The Conqueror of Hearts

In the Land of Sultan Muhammad Al-Fateh

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Travels In Turkey With

Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad
Naqshbandi Mujaddidi (db)

Compiled by

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یک زمانہ صحبت با اولیا
بہتر از صد سالہ طاعت بے ریا

A moment spent in the company of the friends of Allah
Is better than a hundred years of sincere worship

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi ﵀

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Foreword

الحمد لله و كفى و سلام على عباده الذين اصطفى أما بعد

The *khayr ul quroon* were driven by an intense love for Allah ﷻ to take His blessed name to all corners of the world. It is an amazing fact that even today, the boundaries of the core Muslim World are largely demarcated by those lands that were blessed by the physical presence of the *Sahaba*, the *tabi'een*, and the *taba' tabi'een*. During travels across the world, this *faqir* has repeatedly been amazed to find that the final resting places of the people of *khayr al quroon* continue to be the blessed outposts on the borders of Muslim lands. Indeed, an indication is sufficient for the wise!

Turkey is one such land that was blessed with the presence of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. The story of *'ishq* that began with the love and *adab* of Sayyidna Abu Ayub al-Ansari ؓ for the Prophet ﷺ continued until his death at the gates of Constantinople. This same story of *'ishq* continues through to Konya in Turkey, where as a result of his meeting with Shams Tabriz ؒ, Maulana Rumi ؒ's spiritual intoxication led him to produce that timeless expression of love for Allah ﷻ known as the Masnavi. This same *'ishq* and *adab* perfumed the life of Muhammad al-Fatih ؒ that نعم الأمير whose accomplishments were foretold in *ahadeeth*. However, this fable of *'ishq* does not finish here. There are still many more chapters to be written until the end of time.

Faqir is duty-bound by the *amanah* placed on me by my *mashaikh* to take the *zikr* of Allah, Allah, Allah to all corners of the world.

ہم تو زندہ ہیں کہ دنیا میں تیرا نام رہے

We are alive so that Your Name may live on...

May Allah ﷻ accept our journey to Turkey and make it a means of our success in the Hereafter. Ameen.

Faqir Zulfiqar Ahmad
Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi
كان الله عوضا عن كل شئ
5 April 2011

Prologue

Imam Razi said that if a *wali*, a friend of Allah, passes through a town, everyone in that town obtains a portion of his spiritual radiance, his *noor*. The reality of this *noor*, and its recognition by those whose hearts are alive, is illustrated here in three incidents that we have heard from our *Shaykh*, Hazrat Maulana Zulfiqar Ahmad *Naqshbandi Mujaddidi* (db), which are described below.

Once, *Imam-ul-'Ulema was-Suleha*[1] Hazrat Khwaja Abdul Malik Siddiqui visited the town of Khewra in Punjab, Pakistan, accompanied by his renowned *khalifa* (authorized deputy) Hazrat Ghulam Habib[2]. Upon reaching a bend in the mountainous track on which they were travelling, he glanced at the town, now in sight, and asked whether any pious elder, a *buzurg*, lived there. Hazrat Ghulam Habib informed him that no such personality resided there. Khwaja Sahib was not convinced, as his spiritual intuition told him something different, and he repeated his question; Hazrat Ghulam Habib confirmed that he was well-acquainted with the town and its residents, and was certain that no one of notable spiritual standing was amongst

1 This title, which literally means 'Leader of the Religious Scholars and the Righteous' was given to Hazrat Khwaja Abdul Malik Siddiqui, who was the grand-*Shaykh* of our Hazrat (db), in lieu of his exalted spiritual stature and the scope of his influence.

2 *Murshid-e-A'alam* (Spiritual Guide of the World), Hazrat Ghulam Habib was a great *Naqshbandi shaykh* and was the spiritual guide of our Hazrat (db).

them. However, upon reaching the house of their hosts they came to know that another *khalifa* of Hazrat Khwaja Fazal Ali Qureishi[3] was passing through Khewra, and had decided to stop there for a while. Khwaja Sahib turned to his companion and said, "Did I not tell you that I could see the *noor* of a *wali* here?"

Another illuminating incident involves Maulana Badr-e-Alam[4], a great ʻ*alim* (religious scholar) whose book *Tarjuman-us-Sunnah* is well-known and highly respected amongst religious scholars. While writing the book, Maulana Badr-e-Alam engaged the services of *Haji* Muhammad Ala Sahib from *Idara-e-Mujaddidiya*, Karachi, for the actual lettering of the final draft. Once during the course of this engagement, Maulana Badr-e-Alam planned to visit Karachi to work with *Haji* Sahib on editing the book, and wrote a letter to *Haji* Sahib informing him of his upcoming trip. He requested that news of his visit not be made public as he did not want any distractions from the task at hand. Hazrat Syed Zawwaar Husain Shah Sahib[5] was in those days teaching in a school, and was learning the art of handwriting from *Haji* Muhammad Ala Sahib in his spare time. Because his visits were a daily practice, *Haji* Sahib mentioned Maulana Badr-e-Alam's visit to him, and invited him to join them for dinner; Syed Zawwaar Husain Shah Sahib accepted this invitation. Maulana Badr-e-Alam arrived at *Haji* Sahib's as planned and they worked on

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3 Hazrat Khwaja Fazal Ali Qureishi was a great Naqshbandi *shaykh* and was the spiritual guide of Hazrat Khwaja Abdul Malik Siddiqui.

4 Maulana Badre-e-Alam was a leading scholar of *Hadith* who was a graduate of *Madrasah Mazahir-e-ʻUlum* in Saharanpur, and of *Dar al-ʻUlum Deoband*. He attended the lectures of Maulana Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri on the *Sahih* of Imam al-Bukhari for five years. He transcribed his beloved teacher's lectures in Arabic which were published as *Faiz al-Bari ʻala Sahih al-Bukhari*. After the partition of India and Pakistan, Maulana Badr ʻAlam immigrated to Pakistan and lectured at *Dar al-ʻUlum al-Islamiyyah* founded by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani. His love for Madinah Munawwarah led him to settle there in 1953 and he passed away in this Blessed City in 1965.

5 Hazrat Syed Zawwaar Husain Shah Sahib was a great Naqshbandi *shaykh* and the first spiritual guide of our beloved *Shaykh* Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi Mujaddidi (db). He was also a great Hanafi scholar and author of the *fiqh* masterpiece, *Umdatul Fiqh*.

their book, after which they ate dinner and prepared for *Isha*. Maulana Badr-e-Alam ﵀ said to Syed Zawwaar Husain Shah Sahib ﵀, you appear to be a *maulvi*, why don't you lead the prayer tonight. Shah Sahib ﵀ agreed and led the prayer. After completion of the prayer, Maulana Badr-e-Alam ﵀'s state was visibly changed and he said to *Haji* Ala Sahib that if there is a *sahib-e-nisbat buzurg* (a pious elder who has attained the blessing of spiritual connection) in the gathering we should be told about it so that we may be able to give him due respect. *Haji* Sahib was surprised and asked who amongst them was of such an elevated spiritual standing? Maulana Sahib ﵀ pointed to Syed Zawwaar Husain Shah Sahib ﵀, a revelation that shocked *Haji* Ala Sahib for Shah Sahib ﵀ had been his student for many years and out of his humility had never once made mention of his *nisbat*. Maulana Badr-e-Alam Sahib ﵀ explained that it was Shah Sahib ﵀'s greatness that he had kept such a big blessing a secret for so long. *Haji* Ala Sahib later investigated and confirmed that Syed Zawaar Husain Shah Sahib ﵀ had indeed attained the *noor* of *nisbat* from his *Shaykh,* Hazrat Khwaja Muhammad Saeed Quraishi ﵀.

Hazrat once shared with us his own experience from his young age. He had a colleague, a fellow-engineer, whose *Shaykh* was supposed to visit their home-town. He invited Hazrat to meet the *Shaykh* and Hazrat accepted the invitation on the condition that he be introduced to the venerable guest simply as a manager in the factory. On the day of the visit, Hazrat discreetly came to the gathering of the *Shaykh* as promised, donning a cap instead of his signature *imamah* (turban), and sat at the back of the gathering inconspicuously. After the gathering, the *Shaykh* was scheduled to leave for a nearby village, but the man who was supposed to take him there did not arrive on time. Sensing his anxiety at the delay, Hazrat offered to take the *Shaykh* wherever he needed to go. His colleague accepted the offer and they set off, with the *Shaykh* sitting in the passenger seat besides Hazrat, and his colleague in the back. The teacher and student talked along the way as Hazrat drove silently. When they reached the village it was time for

Isha so they decided to make *wudu* and pray. After prayer, the *Shaykh* invited everyone to sit in *muraqabah* (silent remembrance of Allah). However, he finished soon after he had started and summoned his student to him, his displeasure evident from his face as he reprimanded his student for something. He then turned to Hazrat and said "Neither you nor your colleague told me who you really were. You should have informed me to save me from behaving inappropriately with you. I did not show you the respect you deserve. But in *muraqabah* I saw clearly the *noor* of *nisbat* in you. Now to make up for my negligence, I will walk across the entire village with you along with all my students here, to see you off."

During our trip to Syria with Hazrat, we ourselves witnessed how this *noor* of our *Shaykh* can be clearly seen by those whose hearts are alive. On our way to the resting place of Imam Nawawi we stopped for Friday prayers at a local mosque in Nawa. After the prayer ended, the *khateeb* of the mosque came from across the mosque to us, held Hazrat's hand and insisted that he be granted the honor of hosting Hazrat for lunch. However, since our schedule was packed, Hazrat politely declined his offer. The man then reached into his pocket and took out a bundle of notes and handed it to us, insisting that we use it to buy ourselves lunch; we estimated the amount as being a large portion of his monthly salary, and far more than we needed for lunch. We were all wondering how this complete stranger had recognized Hazrat. Just then the *khateeb*, who must have noticed our questioning looks, addressed Hazrat and explained, "Your *noor* drew me to you."

In October 2010, our beloved *Shaykh* took his *noor* to Istanbul. With its strategic location and striking beauty, with the picturesque Bosphorus dividing the city into its Asian and European parts, Istanbul has been the jewel in the crown and the feather in the cap of many a king and commander, and its conquest and defeat has marked the rise and fall of civilizations. This historic city has been the battleground for competing world-powers throughout the ages, and for Muslims it serves as a reminder of the glorious past, as well as the present predica-

ment, of the *Ummah*. While rulers in the past conquered the city with swords and cannon balls, our *Shaykh* entered to wield a power much greater than that of weapons, to produce an effect more long-lasting. He entered, as he always does, to conquer hearts, and time will surely tell what impact this brief trip had on the people of this city.

Prior to Hazrat, other *Naqshbandi* elders also brought the *noor* of this *nisbat* to Turkey. Though the first *Naqshbandis* had arrived in Anatolia by the turn of the 15th century, it was not until later in the 15th century through the *khulafa* and disciples of Hazrat Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar ﵀ that one can speak of a whole wave of *Naqshbandi* transmission to the region, which included modern-day Turkey. It was because of Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar ﵀'s concerted efforts that the *Naqshbandi silsila* spread westward from Central Asia, and a strong base was established for the *Naqshbandi* order in Turkey.

Shaykh Muhammad Murad ﵀, a *khalifa* of Khwaja Muhammad Ma'sum ﵀ (the son of *Imam-e-Rabbani Mujaddid Alf-e-Thaani* Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi ﵀[6]) is credited with introducing and popularizing the *Mujaddidi* branch of the *Naqshbandi* order in the Ottoman lands. In 1681 he visited Istanbul, where he spent five years. After travels spanning almost three decades, he returned to Istanbul in 1729 and died there the same year. A *khanqah*[7] built at his tomb became the center of the *Mujaddidi* branch of the *Naqshbandi* order in the Ottoman lands.

He was followed by Maulana Khalid Rumi ﵀, the most prominent non-Indian *khalifa* of Hazrat Ghulam Ali Dehlawi ﵀. Hazrat Ghulam Ali Dehlawi was the *khalifa* of Mirza Mazhar Jan-e-Janaan ﵀ and the 31st in our Shaykh's line of *Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi mashaikh*, our

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6 *Imam-e-Rabbani, Hazrat Mujaddid Alf-e-Sani, Shaykh* Ahmed Sirhindi ﵀ was one of the greatest of the *mashaikh* of *Naqshband and* the *mujaddid* (renewer) of the second millennium. He expanded the lessons of the *Naqshbandi tariqah* because of which the spiritual chain after him is also known as *Mujaddidi*. He is also famous for having stood up to the Mughal emperor Akbar when the latter invented the new religion of *Deen-e-Ilahi*.

7 A *khanqah* is a spiritual sanctuary where travelers (*salikeen*) on the spiritual path (*sulook*) spend time in the company of their *shaykh* to be cured of their spiritual diseases.

Hazrat being the 40th. Hazrat Ghulam Ali Dehlawi ؒ was known as a *mujaddid* of the 13th (*hijrah*) century. Under his supervision, his *khalifa* Maulana Khalid Rumi ؒ revived the *Naqshbandi* order in Iraq, Syria and Turkey in the early 19th century. In a letter written to the scholars and nobility of Turkey in support of Maulana Khalid ؒ, Hazrat Ghulam Ali ؒ said, "His hand is my hand, his vision is my vision, his friendship is my friendship. His rejection by the people and the animosity they show towards him adversely affect me. His acceptance by the people is like their acceptance of my masters, namely Shah Naqshband, Khwaja Ahrar, Khwaja Muhammad Baqi and Hazrat Mujaddid. It is incumbent upon the Muslims of that country to respect and revere him. Similarly it is obligatory upon me to pray for his well-being, long life and safety." Amongst those that attained the noor of *nisbat* through Maulana Khalid Rumi ؒ were hundreds of '*ulema*, the most prominent amongst them being the great Hanafi jurist, Maulana Ibn e Abideen ash-Shami ؒ, author of the famous *Radd al-Mukhtar*. Maulana Ghulam Muhiyuddin Qusuri ؒ, Hazrat Ghulam Ali ؒ's major *khalifa* and compiler of his discourses, ends his description of Maulana Khalid Rumi ؒ by saying that from visitors (to Delhi) we learn that Maulana is the *marja'* (religious reference) of all the people of Rum (present-day Turkey).

Since a lot of time had since passed, time was apt for another spiritual polish and Allah ﷻ opened the way for our Hazrat to once again take the *noor* of the *Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi nisbat* to Turkey. Those of us who were blessed enough to accompany Hazrat on this journey cannot thank Allah the Most Gracious enough for this opportunity to enrich our souls in the invaluable company of our *Shaykh*. Alhamdulillah a million times! Indeed, the mere sight of the friends of Allah ﷻ serves as a reminder of Him, and the best moments of our lives are the ones spent beholding the radiant countenance of our Hazrat, and under his transformative gaze. As Maulana Rumi ؒ, that iconic lover of Allah ﷻ who hailed from the city of Konya in present-day Turkey, once said:

Prologue

یک زمانہ صحبت با اولیا

بہتر از صد سالہ طاعت بے ریا

A moment spent in the company of the friends of Allah
Is better than a hundred years of sincere worship.

The details of this historic trip are recorded for the benefit of our brothers and sisters who were not with us through these travels. As Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi ﵀ once said, reading about the words and actions of the *awliya* (friends) of Allah ﷻ is an army from the armies of Allah ﷻ, and benefit readers in every age. In the pages that follow, we relive the most precious moments from what were truly amongst the best days of our lives.

Mustafa Kamal
Jamadi ul Awal 1432
(April 2011)

Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to our beloved Shaykh, the light of our lives, without whom our lives would be completely empty.

حساب عمر کا اتنا سا گوشوارا ہے
تمہیں نکال کے دیکھا تو سب خسارا ہے

The statement of my life's account is just this
I take you out and the rest is all loss

We would like to thank Hazrat Maulana Shaykh Ebrahim Muhammad Saheb (db) of South Africa for reviewing the text and providing his extremely beneficial comments and advice. May Allah ﷻ reward him for this.

The writing of this book would also have been impossible without the hard work, wise counsel and continuous support of my wife who spent countless hours in relation to the preparation of this book. May Allah ﷻ reward her as only He best can.

Day 1

The Much Anticipated Arrival

Hazrat was scheduled to arrive at Ataturk International Airport, Istanbul, at 3 pm on Friday, October 15, 2010. This *faqir* arrived a day earlier to make sure the hotel and transportation arrangements were suitable, to stock up on basic supplies, and to scope out the area surrounding our hotel for pharmacies, grocery stores, and money changers etc.

We reached the airport on time to pick up Hazrat; my heart paced wildly as my eyes scanned the arriving passengers for him. Finally, there he was, still tall and striking, easily identifiable by the *noor* and calmness emanating from him, exuding an invisible force drawing those around him helplessly towards him. After exchanging happy greetings, we drove with Hazrat to our hotel.

Shaykh Husain Abdul Sattar (db) from Chicago, who was one of Hazrat's main companions on this journey, was waiting for Hazrat back at the hotel. Upon seeing Hazrat he exclaimed, echoing what all of us felt, "The sun has just risen and lighted up the world of my heart!"

After exchanging happy greetings, we sat in the hotel lobby to discuss the itinerary for the next five days. Our hotel was centrally located in the historic Sultanahmet district of Istanbul, which was where most

of the main historic sites of the city were located, in between numerous *kebab* and souvenir shops. We had rented a mini-bus driven by a local driver to take us on our local excursions, our only planned long distance journey being an overnight trip to Konya, the town of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi ﷺ. Hazrat made minor changes to the itinerary to make it easier for the whole group to follow; as always, he wanted to make sure that everyone felt comfortable throughout the journey.

The Power of the Quran

During the course of this first sitting, *Shaykh* Husain Abdul Sattar showed Hazrat the invitation to his daughter's *Khatam-e-Quran* celebration, which was scheduled for later in the year to commemorate the completion of her memorization of the Quran. Hazrat read the invitation carefully. *Shaykh* Husain then asked Hazrat for some words of advice for the young *haafizah*, which could also be shared with the guests at the party. Hazrat suggested that the program include a talk similar to the one that he had recently delivered at the last Annual *Naqshbandi* Congregation. The talk was on the profound impact of the Quran; on how the Word of Allah ﷻ dramatically changed the lives of individuals who opened their hearts to it, and Hazrat decided to share with us at that point some examples of this.

One of the stories he related involved Hazrat Mus'ab bin Umair ؓ, when he was sent by the Prophet ﷺ to Madinah Munawwarah prior to *hijrah* to teach the Quran, in response to a request by the people of Madinah Munawwarah for such a teacher. Asad bin Zurarah ؓ was his host there; he would introduce Mus'ab ؓ to members of his community and Mus'ab ؓ would proceed to teach them the Book of Allah ﷻ. The leader of the tribe of Aws was Sa'ad bin Ma'az, and Usaid bin Huzair was his cousin and trusted confidante. One day both the tribal elders discussed how the two men, Mus'ab bin Umair ؓ and Asad bin Zurarah ؓ, were fooling the weak in their community. Saad

bin Ma'az sent his cousin to stop them, to make Mus'ab ﵁ abandon his mission and return home. Arming himself with his spear, Usaid bin Huzair went in search of Mus'ab bin Umair ﵁ and Asad bin Zurarah ﵁—a man with a mission. When Asad ﵁ saw Usaid bin Huzair approaching, he informed Mus'ab ﵁ that this was a leader of the community, and requested Mus'ab ﵁ to prove the reality of Allah ﷿ to him, invite him to Islam with sincerity, and speak the truth without fear. Upon reaching them, Usaid launched a tirade of accusations and curses. Mus'ab ﵁ did not lose his temper and asked Usaid to sit down and hear him out; Usaid thought it was only fair to give the opposing party a chance to speak, so he stuck his spear in the ground and sat down. Mus'ab ﵁ spoke with him about Islam and recited some verses of the Quran before him, certain of the impact that the Quran had on the hearts of those who hear it. By the time Mus'ab ﵁ had concluded his recitation, Usaid was smitten and asked, "How can I become like you?" He was told to take a bath and purify himself, then to recite the testimony of faith and perform the ritual prayer. Thereafter, Usaid ﵁ advised Mus'ab ﵁ to direct his efforts at someone more important and influential than himself, and planned to send his cousin Saad bin Ma'az, Mus'ab ﵁'s way.

When Usaid ﵁ returned to Sa'ad bin Ma'az, the tribal leader immediately realized that Usaid ﵁ was a changed man and swore that the face with which Usaid returned was not the same face with which he left him just a short while ago. He questioned his cousin regarding what had happened and Usaid ﵁ told him that he had tried to stop the duo but in vain, and suggested that Sa'ad should go and try for himself—a ploy to expose Sa'ad to the same overwhelming power of the Quran that had turned the world of his heart upside down in a matter of just moments. So Sa'ad went to Mus'ab bin Umair ﵁ and Asad bin Zurarah ﵁ and expressed his contempt for their activities. Mus'ab ﵁ asked him to hear what he had to say and began reciting the initial verses of *Surah* al-Zukhruf before him. Succumbing as his cousin had before him to the irresistible power of the Quran, Sa'ad

too helplessly asked, "How can I become like you?" On Mus'ab ؓ's instructions, Sa'ad bin Ma'az ؓ then recited the testimony of faith and entered the fold of Islam. Thereafter he gathered his people and asked them regarding their assessment of his performance as their leader. The members of his tribe were unanimous in acclaiming his leadership and astute judgment. Thereupon he declared that it would be unlawful for him to talk to any man or woman in his tribe until the entire clan accepted Islam. The entire tribe hailed his demand and as Usaid bin Huzair ؓ had anticipated, not a single person remained outside the fold of Islam. Such was the overwhelming power that the Quran wielded on the hearts of those who heard it, turning enemies into friends in a matter of moments.

Hazrat followed this with the story of Saalim, the freed slave of Abu Huzaifa ؓ. A man by the name of Salaam Ibn Jubair who lived near Madinah Munawwarah went to Syria on a business trip. On the way back he came across a slave-merchant who was selling a young boy at a very low price. Although the boy was neither very good-looking nor very strong, Salaam decided to purchase him, thinking he would sell him off as a servant to someone back home. However, when Salaam put his goods on sale in Madinah Munawwarah, he was able to sell everything at a profit, but was unable to get rid of the young boy, whose ordinary looks and skinny build failed to attract any buyers who considered him too weak to be able to work well. Three days passed with the boy standing hungry and thirsty in the heat, until finally a woman by the name of Thubaita Bint Ya'aar came across him. She was a kind-hearted woman and felt sorry for the boy and asked Salaam how much he wanted for him. Salaam was desperate to get the boy off his hands and was willing to sell him for exactly as much as he had bought him for, without any profit. Thubaita thus bought Saalim, and he became a part of her household.

Now it so happened that a trade caravan returning to Makkah Mukarramah from Syria stopped in Madinah Munawwarah to rest. In the caravan was a well-to-do businessman from Makkah Mukarramah

by the name of Abu Huzaifa who heard about Saalim's story and was impressed by Thubaita's kindness. The young woman had many other virtues and was intelligent, so Abu Huzaifa sent a marriage proposal for her, which was accepted by her family and they were soon married. Sometime thereafter, Abu Huzaifa decided to return home and took Thubaita and Saalim with him. In his absence, the message of Islam had started spreading in Makkah Mukarramah and one of his friends from among the business community there, Usman bin Affan ؓ, had converted to Islam while he was away. He felt that Usman ؓ was behaving differently with him, more distant than before, and asked him regarding his changed attitude. Usman ؓ explained to him that the difference in their religions had created a gap between them and Abu Huzaifa was so moved by his speech that he came to the Prophet ﷺ and accepted Islam. Thubaita followed suit. One day she heard the Prophet ﷺ's sermon highlighting the rewards that a person earns by freeing a slave and decided to free Saalim, but Saalim was very upset by this decision as he had nowhere to go. Abu Huzaifa ؓ offered to keep Saalim with him, which is why Saalim became known as the *Maula*, the freed slave, of Abu Huzaifa ؓ.

Saalim ؓ also accepted Islam and presented himself before the Prophet ﷺ to learn the Quran. The economic condition, social status and physical appearance of this young man were so pitiable that no one considered him worth anything. However, the knowledge of the Quran that he acquired elevated his status such that, according to a narration by Hazrat Abdullah ibn Umar ؓ, a time came when during the emigration to Madinah Munawwarah, the first group of Muslims reached Quba and made Saalim *Maula* Abi Huzaifa ؓ their Imam in prayer, and those praying behind him included Hazrat Umar ؓ. The Quran lifted this child from the *farsh* (floor) to the *arsh* (throne), from the time when no one wanted to buy him to the time when Hazrat Umar ؓ was praying behind him. The Prophet ﷺ heard his recitation of the Quran and said "All praise is for Allah ﷻ who made in my *Ummah* a person like you." The Prophet ؑ also testified that

Saalim ﵁ housed in his heart an intense love of Allah ﷻ. It was this same former slave about whom Umar ﵁ said around the time of his death, "If Saalim ﵁ were alive, I would have made him the leader after me, for the Prophet of Allah ﷺ testified that Saalim loved Allah ﷻ intensely." It is thus that the Quran changes the lives of people, and elevates the fallen to unprecedented heights.

We were all stirred by this talk and certainly not ready to call it a day just yet. So we requested Hazrat to take with us a quick round of some historical sites in Istanbul by night, a plea that Hazrat graciously accepted, despite being fatigued by his journey.

History at Every Turn—A Night Tour of Istanbul

We ate dinner, freshened up, and then set out for our first excursion—a bus ride to see Istanbul's historical sites by night. We passed by the Dolmabahçe Palace, which served as the administrative center of the Ottoman Empire between 1856 and 1922. Prior to that, the Ottoman sultan and his family lived in the Topkapi Palace, a beautiful yet practical construction. However, the later Ottomans felt the need for a more luxurious and stylish European-style palace as a sign of prosperity of the, in truth, fledgling Ottoman Empire, and to compete with symbols of Western affluence. The construction of the lavish Dolmabahce Palace cost the equivalent of 35 tons of gold, 14 of which were used in decoration, and was a huge drain on the already scarce Ottoman financial resources. After the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, it became the summer residence of the President Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the capital having been shifted to Ankara. Ataturk spent the last days of his life in this palace, where he received medical treatment, and died there on November 10, 1938. Later on it was converted into a museum and remains open to the public to this day.

The driver took us over the Galata Bridge across the Golden Horn, an inlet of the Bosphorus on the European side of Istanbul, which got

its name because of its horn shape, and its golden color to onlookers at sunset. We drove up and down narrow hilly streets to see the Galata Tower, a medieval nine-storey stone tower in the Galata district of Istanbul built by the Genoese in 1348.

On the way back we ate Dondurma, Turkish ice cream known for its thickness and chewy texture, imparted because of the inclusion of *salep* (flour made from the root of Early Purple Orchid), and *mastic* (a resin) as key ingredients. As we struggled to enjoy this Turkish specialty, Hazrat labeled the ice cream as the stickiest in the world! We returned to the hotel and settled in for the night with smiles on our faces and immeasurable joy in our hearts at the sweet realization that we were, indeed, in Istanbul with our Hazrat!

Day 2

Visit to the Sacred Trusts

The love of the Prophet ﷺ that our Hazrat had instilled in our hearts was making us impatient to see the sacred relics associated with him ﷺ and his Companions, on display at the famous Topkapi Palace Museum, and we knew that for Hazrat this was also a priority. So without wasting any time, the very first place we visited the next morning was the Topkapi Palace, and once there, we eagerly made our way to the Pavilion of Sacred Trusts.

The Topkapi Palace was the official and primary residence of the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul for approximately 400 years of their

624-year reign, from 1465–1856 CE. It was transformed into a museum in April 1924.

At the Palace, Hazrat by-passed the Imperial Council (*Divan-e-Humayun*), the Royal Treasuries, the Tower of Justice, the Chamber of Petitions, the Conquerors Pavilion, and the personal quarters of the royal family, including the Harem, and headed straight for the Chamber of Sacred Relics, which houses the world famous Sacred Trusts. On the way, we stopped momentarily to see the designated place where the Standard of the Prophet ﷺ would be brought out and stuck into the ground for *barakah* (blessing) every time the Sultan dispatched a military campaign.

History of the Sacred Trusts

The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ loved him more than they loved their own selves. Just as they preserved every word that was uttered from his blessed mouth, they also conserved material objects connected with him. Such was the extent of their love for their Prophet ﷺ, that it is reported that women would send their children with glass bottles to gather in them the drops of sweat that fell from his blessed

body, just as they would collect the strands of hair that fell from his sacred body onto the mattress on which he lay. Just as his words were transmitted from generation to generation, his sacred relics, including his clothing, his weapons, his staff, his flag, his tooth and even the strands of his hair, were passed on in families from one generation to the next. These, as well as objects associated with former Prophets, the Companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and later great Muslims, were also collected by caliphs, becoming symbols of caliphal rule.

It is said that the Ottoman Sultan, Selim Khan I, invaded Egypt in 1517 in response to a dream seen by his doorkeeper, Hasan Aga. In the dream, a group of Arabs with glowing faces arrived at the palace door. Four striking figures stood closest to the door, each bearing a flag in his hands. The one holding the sultan's white flag knocked at the door and when Hasan Aga opened it, the standard-bearer said, "These are the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He sends his greetings (to Selim Khan) and says, 'Tell him to rise and come. The care of the *Haramain* (the two Holy Mosques) has been bestowed upon him.' This is Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, this is Umar al-Farooq, and this is Uthman *Zun-Nurain* (Possessor of Two Lights). I am Ali ibn Abi Talib. Give my greetings to Selim Khan." When the Sultan heard these words, his face reddened and he began to weep. Following this

event, he launched a campaign against the Mamluk sultanate. Egypt and the Hijaz soon came under Ottoman control and Selim's authority over the new territory was officially proclaimed on February 20th, 1517, when the Friday sermon in Cairo was delivered in his name. According to custom, the Imam referred to the sultan as the 'Ruler of *Haramain*.' But Sultan Selim spoke up and corrected him, preferring instead to be referred to as the 'Servant of the *Haramain*.' Sultan Selim I thus became the first Ottoman Sultan to assume the title of caliph and *Khadim-al-Haramain*, Servant of the Two Sacred Mosques.

When he returned from the Egyptian campaign, Sultan Selim I brought with him the sacred relics from the treasuries of the Mamluk state, Abbasid caliphate, and the Hejaz emirate. In Istanbul they were assigned the most precious room in the Sultan's palace, and were shown extraordinary reverence. It is said that Sultan Selim himself used to clean the room which housed the sacred relics. Since the time they were first brought to Topkapi Palace, the best reciters of the Holy Quran were appointed to recite the Quran day and night in the chamber that housed these relics, a 400 year old tradition that continues to this day. During Ottoman times, these relics had a privileged position in official ceremonies, which often included visits to the Holy Mantle of the Prophet ﷺ and the unfolding of the Holy Standard of the Prophet ﷺ when Ottoman military campaigns were dispatched by the Sultan. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, when Topkapi Palace was transformed into a museum, the Pavilion of Sacred Trusts was maintained, and the items stored there continued to be preserved in the former tradition. In August 1962, the sacred relics were put on public display.

While there are a large number of sacred relics that are kept away from the public eye, on display are a number of priceless items. These include belongings attributed to former prophets: a pot belonging to Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, the staff of Prophet Musa عليه السلام, the turban of Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام, Prophet Dawood عليه السلام's sword, and Prophet Yahya عليه السلام's forearm and a fragment of his skull. Also on display are swords

belonging to the four Rightly-guided Caliphs and other Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and keys to the door of the Blessed Ka'aba, an old casing of the Black Stone, and older models of the *Mizaab-e-Rahmat*, the gold rain gutter of the Blessed Ka'aba. The highlight of the exhibit are items associated with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, including his tooth that fell in the Battle of Uhud, his footprint, his sword, bow and staff, his seal, a bowl from which he drank water, and a letter dispatched by him. His mantle and banner, the most valuable of the sacred trusts, are kept safe in a chest, which we could see from a distance through glass windows. We felt truly blessed that some items that are usually not on display were exhibited for visitors that day, including a shirt and prayer mat belonging to Hazrat Fatima رضي الله عنها, the beloved youngest daughter of the Prophet ﷺ, and a shirt belonging to her son, Hazrat Husain رضي الله عنه. In this same section, we were blessed to see what was truly the highlight of the Pavilion of Sacred Trusts—strands of hairs of the Prophet ﷺ. Our hearts were captured by these exhibits, and we could feel the *barakah* of these items. While in the Pavilion of Sacred Trusts, we also passed through the room where the Holy Qur'an has been read almost continuously for 400 years, and saw with our own eyes a *Qari* adding *barakah* to the rooms with his recitation of the Book of Allah ﷻ.

Other rooms in the museum housed precious items belonging to generations of Ottoman sultans and their families: jewelry and jewelry boxes, mirrors and combs, cups and goblets, princes' cradles and kings' thrones, armors and swords. The most valuable exhibit from the Imperial Treasury is the 86 carat, pear-shaped, diamond known as the Spoonmaker's Diamond. Hazrat rushed through these exhibits, unimpressed by their glitter, as other tourists drooled over these opulent displays. His purpose of visiting the museum, in fact one of the primary motivations behind his entire trip to Istanbul, had been achieved. His walk through the remaining exhibits was more for the interest of the rest of the group than for himself, but after the invaluable items we had just seen, the collection of royal treasures failed to appeal to any of us. Truly, all the diamond studded personal

ornaments of the daughters of worldly kings were on one side, and the patched mantle of the beloved daughter of the beloved of Allah ﷺ, may peace and blessings be upon him, on the other. *Alhamdulillah*, that Allah ﷻ blessed us with the opportunity to feast our sinful eyes on these priceless treasures.

One of the most popular sections of the Topkapi Palace that is frequented by tourists is the Imperial Harem containing more than 400 rooms which housed the Sultan's wives and numerous slave-girls, as well as other women and children of the Sultan's family including his mother. However, Hazrat expressly forbade those traversing the spiritual path from visiting the Imperial Harem explaining that a *saalik* should completely avoid every place which even slightly inclines the heart towards lust.

Turning Heads at Topkapi Palace

As we walked through the courtyards, gardens and gates of the Topkapi Palace back towards our bus, we noticed that our group was turning a noticeable number of heads. We were surprised by the attention we were attracting; no doubt our clothing was making us stand out amidst the largely European tourists, but it was unlikely that that this was the first time so many of the visitors had seen Muslims adorning the *Sunnah* dress. When random people started coming up specifically to Hazrat and introducing themselves, we realized that it was not the rest of us but rather Hazrat towards whom these people were feeling attracted. As this became a pattern through the rest of our trip, Hazrat himself later explained that it was the *tawajjuh* (spiritual attention) that he was focusing on the hearts of these people that was drawing them towards him. Giving *tawajjuh*, we learnt, gets *tawajjuh* (attention) sometimes of the unwelcome variety! Many non-Muslims approached Hazrat requesting to photograph him, but Hazrat politely declined their requests, and we quickened our pace back to the bus.

Back at the bus, this *faqir* brought pomegranate juice and freshly roasted corn on the cob for members of the group, and got lots of *duas* from some very hungry and thirsty companions!

After seeing the Topkapi Palace Museum, we all became highly interested in learning more about Ottoman history. To this end, our next visit was to the Panorama 1453 History Museum.

Panorama 1453 History Museum

The Panorama 1453 History Museum is dedicated to preserving the history of the Muslim conquest of Constantinople. We headed straight for the panorama, the highlight of the museum. This is a dome-like structure, 38 meters in diameter and 20 meters tall consisting of some 3000 square meters of pictures, providing a full panoramic view which captures a decisive moment in the Ottoman capture of Istanbul. The purpose of the panorama, which is topped off with powerful sound effects, is to make visitors feel like they have been transported through a time machine to the actual event of the Muslim conquest of Constantinople, and that is exactly how we felt! When we entered the dome, we immediately felt like we were entering into another time zone, another world. Painted across the dome, surrounding us on all sides, was the scene of the battle. With the sound of the Ottoman cannon blasts booming in the background, and real weapons accompanying the painted landscape, one could experience the excitement of the event; as one member of our group put it, it felt as if we were ourselves participating in the conquest. As we seeped in the scene around us, we were reminded of the following verses by Iqbal:

ٹل نہ سکتے تھے اگر جنگ میں اڑ جاتے تھے

پاؤں شیروں کے بھی میداں میں اکھڑ جاتے تھے

تجھ سے سرکش ہوا کوئی تو بگڑ جاتے تھے
تیغ کیا چیز ہے ہم توپ سے لڑ جاتے تھے
نقش توحید کا ہر دل پہ بٹھایا ہم نے
زیرِ خنجر بھی یہ پیغام سنایا ہم نے
تو ہی کہ دے کہ اکھاڑا درِ خیبر کس نے؟
شہر قیصر کا جو تھا اس کو کیا سر کس نے؟
توڑے مخلوق خداوندوں کے پیکر کس نے؟
کاٹ کر رکھ دیئے کفّار کے لشکر کس نے؟

We were immovable once we stood firmly in battle
When even the feet of lions in the battlefield would be uprooted
If someone rebelled against You, we would become enraged
What is a sword, we even fought against canons!
We impressed the engraving of *Tauheed* in every heart
We conveyed your message even under threat from daggers
So just say it, oh Allah, who uprooted the gates of Khyber?
Who conquered the city of Caesar?
Who destroyed the false idols?
Who cut down the armies of those who rejected You?

One of the illustrations in the highly detailed scene that struck us all

was that even in the middle of the fiercest battle the conquering Sultan, Muhammad al-Fateh ؒ, was shown to be flanked on one side by his spiritual guide, *Shaykh* Aaq Shemseddin ؒ, who was shown raising his hands in *dua*, and on the other by the grand *Mufti*.

Significance of the Conquest of Istanbul

Iqbal summarized the importance of Istanbul in the following verses:

خطۂ قسطنطنیہ یعنی قیصر کا دیار
مہدئ امّت کی سطوت کا نشان پایدار
صورت خاک حرم یہ سرزمیں بھی پاک ہے
آستان مسند آرائے شہؐ لولاک ہے
نکہت گل کی طرح پاکیزہ ہے اس کی ہوا
تربت ایوب انصاریؓ سے آتی ہے صدا
اے مسلماں ملّت اسلام کا دل ہے یہ شہر
سینکڑوں صدیوں کی کشت و خوں کا حاصل ہے یہ شہر

The tract of Constantinople, the city of Caesar
The perpetual banner of the grandeur of the *Ummah's Mahdi*
Like the dust of the Haram, this region is also holy
It is the shrine of the descendants of *Shah-e-Lawlaak* (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ)
Its air is pure like the fragrance of rose
A voice calls out from the tomb of Abu Ayub Ansari
"O Muslim! This city is the heart of the Islamic Nation
This city is the outcome of millenniums of bloody sacrifices."

The Roman Emperor Constantine changed the course of history in 330 AD when, after accepting Christianity, he shifted his capital from Rome to the city of Byzantium on the Bosphorus, renaming it New Rome, though it later came to be known as Constantinople. The city became simultaneously the center of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire as well as the Christian Orthodox Church. It is about this city that the Prophet ﷺ said:

لتفتحن القسطنطينية فلنعم الأمير أميرها ولنعم الجيش ذلك الجيش

Truly you shall conquer Constantinople and surely what a wonderful leader will its leader be and surely what a wonderful army will that army be! (*Musnad Imam Ahmad*)

The burning desire to be from this "wonderful army" motivated many Muslims right from the time of the *Sahaba* to attempts the conquest of Constantinople. The first of these expeditions was sent by Hazrat Mu'awiyya ؓ. This was followed by expeditions during the caliphates of Hazrat Umar bin Abdul Aziz ؒ and Haroon al-Rashid ؒ. However, a number of factors made it extremely difficult to conquer Constantinople.

The city was built on a more or less triangular peninsula, bounded on the south by the Sea of Marmara and on its north by the Golden Horn, its landward side being protected by mighty defense walls originally built in 447 AD. Furthermore, the cold weather in the region was intolerable for the Muslim invaders who were accustomed to a much warmer climate, and the political and religious importance of the city was such that any attempts to invade it would be met by a reaction from all of Europe. For eight centuries, the conquest of Constantinople was a dream for many a Muslim commander. However, this honor was destined for the 8th Ottoman Sultan, a young man named Muhammad, who captured the city and brought an end to the Byzantine Empire at the young age of 21.

Day 2

Founding of the Ottoman Sultanate: The Story of Osman Ghazi

The Ottoman sultanate was founded by Sultan Osman Ghazi, a Turk of humble origins whose respect of the Quran elevated him to lofty heights. His inspiring story tells of a good, well-meaning young man who was very fond of hosting guests. Whenever he would come across a wayfarer, he would bring him home, feed him, and provide for him a place to stay for the night before seeing him off the following morning. All the people in his village belonged to one tribe, and did not appreciate his bringing outsiders amongst them. They consulted each other and decided to stop him from doing so, and one day cautioned him against bringing any more guests to his home. However, he was not intimidated and continued in his generous ways. This irked the people of his village and they warned him that if he brought home another guest, they would beat him up and throw him out of the village. He did not take heed and the next time he brought home a guest, his fellow tribesmen threatened to kill him if he did not leave the village immediately.

Osman Ghazi was distraught, and worried about where he would go. He thought of his *shaykh* who lived in a neighboring village just a few kilometers away, as one thinks of one's own in times of need. He went to his *shaykh* and presented his situation before him, and his *shaykh* advised him to get some rest, suggesting that they discuss the issue in the morning and think of a solution.

Osman Ghazi spent the night in the guest quarters. He woke up at the time of *Tahajjud*, and after performing *salah,* looked for a copy of the Quran as it was his routine to recite the Quran at this time. To his horror, he discovered that the Quran was in a shelf which was situated in the direction of his feet when he was sleeping; he picked up the Holy Quran, kissed it, held it against his chest and sought the forgiveness of his Lord for his mistake. Here Osman Ghazi was expressing his heart-felt remorse for having disrespected the Book of

Allah ﷻ, albeit unknowingly, and there in his sleep, his *shaykh* was instructed to inform Osman Ghazi to leave the village at once, for he was destined for great honor in the world.

Upon awaking from this dream, Osman Ghazi's *shaykh* immediately came to his young student, only to find him clutching the Quran, tears pouring down his face. He inquired regarding his state and Osman Ghazi informed him that he had slept the entire night with his feet towards the shelf in which the Quran was kept. As per his dream, his *shaykh* then instructed him to leave, giving him glad tidings of honor in the world in times to come. Osman Ghazi cried even more as he had nowhere to go, distressed that his *shaykh* was making him leave what he had considered a sanctuary. But his *shaykh* insisted that he depart at once, and forced him to leave in order to pursue his destiny.

Soon after leaving, Osman Ghazi came across a group of ten to fifteen young men who had dedicated their lives for the service of the *deen*. However, they did not have a leader as none of them was willing to take up that position. The night before they had decided that the first person they would come across outside the city limits the next morning would become their leader. As fate would have it, the first person they thus met was Osman Ghazi. They informed him of their intention and he readily agreed to fulfill this role.

Thereafter, the band of young men set out in the path of Allah ﷻ. Whenever they would pass through a village, they would impress the local people with their outer beauty and their inward piety. The villagers would ask them where they were headed and were told that the group had dedicated their lives to the service of Allah ﷻ. A few men from every village would join their ranks until, eventually, hundreds of people came into the fold. They consulted each other and decided that since Muslim civilians in border towns would often face undue harassment from non-Muslim armies from neighboring lands, they would go there to protect the innocent. They headed towards these border towns with these noble intentions, but when they were a

few kilometers away, a non-Muslim spy of the neighboring king saw them approaching and hurriedly informed the king of the impending danger— an army of about a thousand enthusiastic young men who were not afraid of dying. The spy warned the king that his army would not be able to compete with this band of fearless warriors and advised him to strike a deal with them.

The Christian king was old and wanted to avoid a confrontation. He sent a message to Osman Ghazi requesting peace between them, offering to give him his daughter in marriage as a sign of his sincerity. Osman Ghazi consulted the rest of the group and they suggested that he should take the king up on the offer. Hence the king's daughter, converted to Islam and was married to Osman Ghazi, who then started living there. It so happened that this daughter was the king's only child, so when he died shortly thereafter, no-one was considered more worthy of taking his place than his accomplished son-in-law.

When he inherited the kingdom, Osman Ghazi remembered how he had ended up in this position. He had been thrown out of his home, rejected by his own kin. His *shaykh* had told him that because he had so much respect of the Quran in his heart, Allah ﷻ would grant him respect and honor in the world. Since he owed his attainment of this kingdom to the Quran, Osman Ghazi decided that he would rule herein according to Quranic law, and establish it as the law of the land. He successfully implemented the *Shariah* in his domain, to the extent that during a court hearing, the Quran would be brought into the courtroom first, and everyone would stand up to honor it. Then, once the hearing was complete, the Quran would be removed from the room first and then the court was adjourned.

This establishment of the rule of the Quran was the foundation of the Ottoman Caliphate, which lasted for hundreds of years, allowing people to live their lives according to the Will of Allah ﷻ. Hence, one man's respect of the Quran became the cause for the establishment of this Islamic caliphate. Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh was the descendent of Osman Ghazi, seven generations after him.

Al-Fateh's *Murshid* (Spiritual Guide): *Shaykh* Aaq Shemsuddin ؒ

Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh was nurtured from an early age by his spiritual guide *Shaykh* Aaq Shemsuddin ؒ. *Shaykh* Aaq Shemsuddin was a descendant of Hazrat Abu Bakr al-Siddiq ؓ. The *Shaykh* taught the young boy the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Arabic, Persian, Turkish, mathematics, history and the art of governance. *Shaykh* Aaq was also appointed by Sultan Muhammad's father to the council of '*ulema* who acted as his regents when, as a young man, Sultan Muhammad was appointed by his father to govern one of the provinces to receive practical training in the art of governance. But most of all, the *Shaykh* instilled in his heart the spirit of Islam and the deep desire to be the one destined to fulfill the Prophetic prophecy regarding the opening of Constantinople for Islam.

Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ؒ and the Conquest of Istanbul

When Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh succeeded his father Murad II to the throne in 1451, it seemed that he would prove an incapable ruler and would not pose a real threat to the powers at the time. This belief was reinforced by the friendly assurances he gave to envoys that visited him early on during his reign. However, it soon became evident that the young sultan, driven by the Islamic spirit instilled in him by his teachers, was committed to extending the limits of the Islamic empire, being particularly devoted to the conquest of Constantinople. Soon after he came to power he began preparations for this monumental campaign.

One of the main reasons for the failure of prior attempts at conquering the city were the reinforcements sent via sea by other European rulers to help their brethren in Constantinople. To prevent this from

happening required complete control over the narrow Bosphorus straits. During his rule, Sultan Muhammad II's grandfather, Sultan Bayezid I, had built a fortress on the Asian side of the Bosphorus known as *Anodolu Hisari*, but this alone was not sufficient. Shortly after coming to power Sultan Muhammad II ordered the construction of an even stronger fortress exactly opposite the one built by Bayezid I, a few miles north of Constantinople on its European side. With the construction of this fortress, which came to be known as the *Rumeli Hisari*, Sultan Muhammad II ensured that no help from its allies would be able to reach Constantinople through the waters in between in times of war.

Sultan Muhammad II employed the services of a Hungarian engineer, Orban, to produce state of the art weapons to be used in the proposed campaign; this included a 27 foot long cannon that could hurl a 1300 pound projectile over a mile. The master founder initially tried to sell his services to the Byzantines, who were unable to secure the funds needed to hire him. Orban then left Constantinople and approached Sultan Muhammad II, claiming that his weapon could blast "the walls of Babylon itself". Given abundant funds and materials, the Hungarian engineer built the gun within three months at Adrianople, from which it was dragged by sixty oxen to Constantinople.

Sultan Muhammad II expanded and strengthened his naval fleet as well as his army, and in April 1453 commenced the siege of Constantinople. His fleet extended from shore to shore in the form of a crescent at the entrance of the Bosphorus, while his army positioned itself to attack the city walls, which protected the city from its only non-coastal side. Constantinople was now surrounded by Ottoman forces from all sides.

An Extraordinary Plan

Sultan Muhammad's massive cannon ball fired on the wall for weeks, but because of its imprecision and the time it took to reload, the damage it caused was repaired after each shot before the next one could be fired, thus limiting its effect. Mines were dug under the walls and filled with ammunition that was then exploded to weaken their foundations, but the walls were amongst the strongest fortified walls in existence at the time and proved difficult to penetrate. A heavy chain had been tied across the entrance of the Golden Horn, preventing the Ottoman fleet from entering and attacking the city from that side.

When all options seemed closed, Allah ﷻ inspired Sultan Muhammad II with an extraordinary plan, the likes of which had never before been conceived even by the greatest of military minds. To circumvent the chain, Sultan Muhammad II ordered the clearing of a path across the Galata on the North of the Golden Horn. A road of greased logs was then laid out over the hills. A team of oxen then pulled the Ottoman navy's ships over the logs into the Golden Horn, remarkably in the course of a single night. The next morning, the Byzantine army discovered to their horror that the Ottoman navy was now at their doorstep. The Ottoman navy now began bombarding Constantinople from the Golden Horn.

Shaykh Aaq Shemsuddin's *Duas*

When the attack began, Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh wanted his *Shaykh* to be by his side, supporting the Ottomans with his *duas*. However, when the Sultan's messenger approached the *Shaykh's* tent to request him to accompany him, the guard on duty refused to allow the messenger to enter. The Sultan, facing the greatest test of his life, was deeply upset and himself went to his *Shaykh's* tent only to discover that he too was refused entry as the *Shaykh* had explicitly prohibited his guards from allowing anyone inside. The Sultan, still deeply upset, took his dagger and cut open the side of the tent. Inside, he found his *Shaykh* prostrating to Allah ﷻ, beseeching the Almighty to assist the Ottoman army. The Sultan's heart was filled with peace and he returned to his post and continued to lead the attack on Constantinople.

The Opening of Constantinople

More Byzantine troops now had to be shifted to the unprecedented front of the Golden Horn, weakening the defense of the city's walls on the opposite side. Seeing this as an opportunity, Sultan Muhammad II launched an all-out offensive on that front. The Ottoman army spent the night before this final onslaught in the remembrance of Allah ﷻ and *Tahajjud* prayers, exerting themselves in *dua*. After *Fajr* prayers, the Sultan gave the orders for a general attack and according to some narrations, he proclaimed that *inshaAllah*, the Ottomans will pray the *Zuhr* prayer in the church of Ayasofya. On May 29, 1453, after a siege that lasted for 53 days, the Prophet (saw)'s prediction was fulfilled and the Ottoman red standard was raised over Constantinople.

With his *Shaykh* just ahead of him, Sultan Muhammad entered the city on his horse amidst a jubilant procession, triumphant, yet humble at the recognition that this unprecedented success was entirely the blessing of His Creator. It was now that he was given the title of '*Al-Fateh*,' 'The Conqueror.' He went straight to the Hagia Sophia, but before entering it, he took some dust and poured it over his turban as a sign of his humility before Allah ﷻ. He then entered what was formerly the center of Christianity for a thousand years, and there he called the *azaan* and performed *Zuhr* prayers together with his *Shaykh*. Those who had taken refuge in the Church, believing that once there, Divine help would keep them safe from invaders, were now fearful about their fate. But the victorious sultan had been advised by his *Shaykh* to respect the *Shariah* rules in relation to protection of conquered civilians, and declared amnesty for them. Byzantine historian George Sphrantzes was an eyewitness to the fall of Constantinople. In his chronicle about the fall of the city, he wrote down the events that had taken place at the end of the third day of the conquest:

"On the third day after the fall of our city, the Sultan celebrated his victory with a great, joyful triumph. He issued a proclamation: the citizens of all ages who had managed to escape detection were to

leave their hiding places throughout the city and come out into the open, as they would remain free and no question would be asked. He further declared the restoration of houses and property to those who had abandoned our city before the siege, if they returned home they would be treated according to their rank and religion, as if nothing had changed."

After the conquest of Constantinople, the first sermon in the Hagia Sophia was given by *Shaykh* Aaq Shemseddin, who is also reported to have guided the Sultan to the location of the grave of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari ﵁.

Interestingly, both the first and the last Byzantine emperors were named Constantine; Constantine I founded Constantinople as the capital of the Roman Empire a thousand years before the Muslim conquest, and Constantine XI Palaiologos was the last Roman emperor who was killed by the Muslims during the Ottoman siege. Constantine XI Palaiologos was the last reigning Roman emperor to use the title of "Ceasar" and after he was killed, there was no other Ceasar to take his place, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the Prophet ﷺ as narrated by Abu Hurayrah ﵁:

إذا هلك كسرى فلا كسرى بعده وإذا هلك قيصر فلا قيصر
بعده والذي نفسي بيده لتنفقن كنوزهما في سبيل الله

When Khusraw perishes, there will be no Khusraw after him, and when Ceasar perishes, there will be no Ceasar after him, and I swear by Him in Whose Hand is my soul, you shall surely spend their treasures in the path of Allah ﷻ. (*Musnad Imam Ahmad*).

After visiting the Panorama 1453 History Museum, we were all filled with deep reverence for the conqueror who had received glad tidings of being a good leader from the blessed mouth of the Prophet ﷺ himself, and we headed towards his final resting place to pay our respects.

Visit to Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ﵀

After the Panorama Museum, we visited the burial place of Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh at the Fateh Jami' mosque to pay our respects to this inspiring Muslim leader who had by now captured our hearts and imagination. The Fateh Jami' is located in the deeply religious Fateh district of Istanbul, which is distinctly different from other areas of the city. The atmosphere in Fateh district is distinctly religious; to this day, it is a center of the *Naqshbandi tariqah* in Turkey and it was heart-warming to see so many Turks with full beards and in religious attire.

The Fateh Jami' complex was constructed by the order of Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh to commemorate his conquest of Istanbul in 1453, and was the first imperial Ottoman mosque. The original complex consisted of a set of well-planned buildings constructed around the mosque, including eight *madrasahs* (schools of sacred Islamic knowledge) accommodating up to 1000 students, a library, hospital, hospice, caravanserai, market, public baths, primary school and public kitchen, which served food to the poor. When Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh conquered Constantinople he built a

Naqshbandi khanqah in the Aksaray neighborhood of the city, and assigned income from the *waqf* (charitable trust) of the Fateh Jami' complex to that *khanqah*.

After praying *Asr* and spending some time in the mosque we went to Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh's tomb. There we learnt that at the height of his highly successful military career, with plans of invading deeper into Europe, Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh was poisoned. We wondered what the map of the world would have looked like if this 'Master of Two Seas and Two Continents' had indeed been able to complete his planned campaigns in Egypt, Italy and the Mediterranean. The thought was indeed awe-inspiring but Allah ﷻ is the Best of planners, and Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ؒ succumbed to the assassination attempt in May 1481, at the age of forty-nine.

Next to Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ؒ's final resting place, the caretakers of the mosque had put up a plaque reminding us of the blessed words of the Prophet ﷺ, "You will indeed conquer Constantinople, surely what a wonderful leader will its leader be and surely what a wonderful army will that army be."

Another plaque on top of Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ؒ's grave reminded us that even the best of leaders must one day taste death.

The tomb had closed by the time we got there but Hazrat led us in collective *dua* from outside. Our hearts wept at how the *Ummah* today had forsaken the efforts made by this great leader and lost the spirit that drove him to open this part of the world for Islam; may Allah grant him the highest place in Paradise. *Ameen*.

Understanding the Secret of the *Ummah's* Success

We returned to the hotel with a sense of joy at our glorious past, as represented by Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh and his conquest of Constantinople, yet saddened by the realization of our collective decline since the Ottoman heyday. As if sensing our state, Hazrat sat us down and talked to us about the causes of our decline, and identified clearly the way out of this abyss.

Hazrat explained that when we were motivated Muslims, exerting ourselves in the worship of our Lord, when our connection with Allah was strong, and when we lived our lives in accordance with His Will, we experienced the help of the Almighty in all our affairs. This was a time about which Poet of the East, Muhammad Iqbal, said,

تھے ہمیں ایک ترے معرکہ آراؤں میں
خشکیوں میں کبھی لڑتے کبھی دریاؤں میں
دیں اذانیں کبھی یورپ کے کلیساؤں میں
کبھی افریقہ کے تپتے ہوئے صحراؤں میں
شان آنکھوں میں نہ جچتی تھی جہانداروں کی
کلمہ پڑھتے تھے ہم چھاؤں میں تلواروں کی

Of all the brave warriors, there were none but only we,
Who fought Your battles on land and often on the sea
Our calls to prayer rang out from the churches of Europe,
And at times in Africa's scorching desert sands
We ruled the world, but regal glories our eyes disdained,
Under the shades of glittering swords the *kalima* we proclaimed.

However, when we allowed love for the *dunya* to enter our hearts at the expense of love for our Creator, when we made our *nafs* (lower self) our guide, when we abandoned adherence to the *shariah* and the *sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ and adopted the ideals and ways of the disbelievers, we deprived our own selves of the Help and Mercy of our Lord and weakened ourselves before our enemies.

ہر کوئی مست مے ذوق تن آسانی ہے
تم مسلماں ہو یہ انداز مسلمانی ہے؟
حیدری فقر ہے نہ دولت عثمانی ہے
تم کو اسلاف سے کیا نسبت روحانی ہے؟
وہ زمانے میں معزز تھے مسلماں ہوکر
اورتم خوار ہوئے تارک قرآں ہو کر

Everyone is intoxicated with the wine of indulgence
Are you Muslims? Is this the way of Islam?
You have neither the *faqr* of Haider nor the wealth of Uthman
What spiritual connection do you have with your pious predecessors?
They were respected in the world for being Muslims
And you are disgraced for having abandoned the Qur'an.

As Iqbal was to ask most pertinently in Armaghaan-e-Hijaz,

تیرے دریا میں طوفاں کیوں نہیں ہے
خودی تیری مسلماں کیوں نہیں ہے
عبث ہے شکوہ تقدیر یزداں
تو خود تقدیر یزداں کیوں نہیں ہے

Why is there not a storm in your waters?
Why is your self not Muslim?
You are always complaining about your fate,
Why are you yourself not the maker of your own destiny?

Hazrat then explained that the only way out of this disgraceful situation is to work on our inner selves. Love for the *dunya* is the cause of our spiritual deaths; we must purge our hearts of it before we can experience a spiritual reawakening and re-establish our connection with our Lord. This renewed spirit would then inspire us to obey the Almighty no matter what the odds, and would catapult us to the same lofty heights that Muslims have experienced in the past.

قوّت عشق سے ہر پست کو بالا کر دے
دہر میں اسم محمدؐ سے اجالا کر دے

عقل ہے تیری سپر عشق ہے شمشیر تری
میرے درویش! خلافت ہے جہانگیر تری
ما سوا اللہ کے لئے آگ ہے تکبیر تری
تو مسلماں ہے تو تقدیر ہے تدبیر تری
کی محمدؐ سے وفا تو نے تو ہم تیرے ہیں
یہ جہاں چیز ہے کیا لوح و قلم تیرے ہیں

With the power of love, elevate the fallen to lofty heights
Illuminate the age with the name of Muhammad ﷺ
Intellect is your shield, love is your sword
My dervish! The world is your caliphate
Your *takbir* is like fire for the Godless
If you are Muslim, your destiny is what you make it
If you are loyal to Muhammad ﷺ, then We are yours
What of this world, the Tablet and the Pen are yours.

Because it cured sick hearts and breathed life into dead ones, the work of the *silsila* is crucial to this solution.

آج بھی ہو جو ابراہیمؑ کا ایماں پیدا
آگ کر سکتی ہے انداز گلستاں پیدا

If the *imaan* of Ibrahim is born even now
Fire can provide the comfort of a garden even now.

Knowing very well of our interest in Sultan Muhammad's conquest of Constantinople and of how inspired we were by it, at the end of our session it was suggested that to gain a fuller picture we should ourselves see some of the key places in this conquest: the *Anodolu* and

Rumeli forts, the entry point for the Sultan's naval forces, the Golden Horn. One way of doing so was by boat, and we decided to venture into the Bosphorus as soon as the weather would allow for it, which happened sooner than anticipated.

Day 3

Lessons in History along the Bosphorus

It had been drizzling almost constantly since the time we arrived in Istanbul, with the sky a gloomy grey and the air nippy. However, we woke up the next morning to a clear blue sky, a bright cheerful sun, and a pleasant springy breeze. The sudden change of weather raised our hopes and after Hazrat's approval, we rushed to book a boat for our group. It seemed like most of the other foreign visitors in Istanbul had the same idea! After much negotiating, we were able to find one that was available only for the next two hours, so we rushed to make it in time.

The experience itself surpassed our expectations. The air was fresh, the sun pleasantly warm, the scenery spectacular, and the company (of our Hazrat) unmatched! The water in which we glided separated the Asian and European sides of Turkey, and we were able to see some important buildings at the periphery of the city, including the *Anodolu* and *Rumeli* forts on either side. We got a feel for how Sultan Muhammad's naval ships must have approached Istanbul, and also saw the gateway to the Golden Horn, imagining the frustration of the Muslim fleet upon seeing it chained off.

From a distance we could also see the Suleymaniye Mosque, which contains an important collection of Islamic manuscripts, as well as the tomb of one of the greatest of Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh's descendants— the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman Al-Qanuni ﵀, who was known in the West as "Suleyman the Magnificent". Sultan Suleyman spoke five languages including Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Bosnian and Chaghtai. He studied the *Shariah*, science, history, literature and military strategy. Sultan Suleyman ﵀ personally led the Ottoman forces deep into Europe to the gates of Vienna; he is consid-

ered the last *khalifah*[8] to have personally led Muslims in the battlefield. Turning to the Middle East, he renovated the *Haramain* of Makkah Mukarramah and Madinah Munawwarah and defeated the treacherous Safavids of Iran. In Asia, he pursued the Portuguese colonialists to the shores of India and even sent Ottoman support to the Sultanate of Aceh in modern Indonesia. During Sultan Suleyman's time, the Ottomans were the only superpower of the world and thousands of talented Europeans fulfilled their dream of immigrating to Ottoman lands in what can be termed in today's language as a "brain drain".

But his greatest legacy was probably his complete reorganization of the Ottoman legal and administrative system for which he earned the title of Al-Qanuni, the Law-giver. This law was the cornerstone of the longevity of the Ottoman Empire for centuries to come. Sultan Suleyman also had great reverence for the *mashaikh* of Naqshband and built a mosque in Istanbul for Baba Haydar Samarqandi ﵁, one of Khwaja UbaydUllah Ahrar ﵁'s *khulafa*. Suleyman the Magnificent passed away while he was out on a military campaign in Hungary. May Allah ﷾ grant him shade under His throne on the Day of Judgment. *Ameen*.

Nearby is also the tomb of the greatest Muslim architect, Khwaja Mi'mar Sinan Agha known in history simply as Sinan al-Mi'maar, who is credited with designing and building more mosques than anyone else in the history of the *Ummah*. How unfortunate that our youth know about Michelangelo and Leonardo di Vinci but do not know who Sinan was!

Sinan converted to Islam at the age of 21 and joined the Ottoman military service. He excelled in mathematics and also became a master of artillery. As an architect, he paid attention to and learnt about the weak points of buildings while gunning them down during military campaigns. In 1539 at the age of 50, he was appointed the chief

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8 Here the term *khalifah* refers not to an authorized deputy in a spiritual order but rather the legitimate political leader of the Muslims.

architect of the empire, applying the insight he had acquired in the army to the creation of mosques and *madrasahs* and civic structures of all kinds including roads, waterworks and bridges. Sinan trained hundreds of assistants and supervised a team of master builders and architects. During the next 50 years, Sinan led the construction of more than 450 structures including 94 large mosques, 52 small mosques, 57 *madrasahs*, 7 schools for training reciters of the Qur'an, 3 hospitals, 22 mausoleums, 17 public kitchens, 48 baths and 8 bridges. His masterpieces include the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne and the Suleimaniye in Istanbul.

From our boat, we also passed by the tomb of Barbarossa Hayreddin Pasha, the great Muslim hero and Ottoman Admiral who, together with his brother Aruj Reis, turned the Mediterranean Sea into a Muslim lake and rescued numerous oppressed Spanish Muslims who had been forced to convert to Christianity as a result of the Reconquista of Andalusia. Near his tomb, the following poem is engraved:

> Whence on the sea's horizon comes that roar?
> Can it be Barbarossa now returning

From Tunis or Algiers or from the Isles?
　　Two hundred vessels ride upon the waves,
Coming from lands the rising Crescent lights:
　　O blessed ships, from what seas are ye come?

Zikr on the Bosphorus

After a while we headed upstairs to the open deck to get a better view of the historical sites. We were savoring every moment, wishing that time would come to a standstill and we could remain like this forever. Someone from the group read our hearts in requesting Hazrat to conduct *muraqabah*, which he agreed to do. Thus in the open sea under the open sky, with the continent of Asia on one side and Europe on the other side, and the distractions of the world seeming far behind us, we sat in the remembrance of our Lord, the sweet voice of our Hazrat pulling at our heartstrings as he read some beautiful verses during the *zikr*. Hazrat then made *dua*, using words that we had not heard from him before, referring to our unique situation. "Oh Allah, when on land we ask of You, now on water we are also asking only of You; oh Allah, just as you granted Muslims success in taking over this part of the world, grant us success in overcoming our *nafs* and *Shaytan*." We approached the shore with brimming hearts and eyes.

We had peeled and eaten pistachios on the upper deck and Hazrat instructed us to clean up the mess the shells had made before we got off the boat. Although the boat was fully serviced and the staff on board even told us that they would take care of it later, Hazrat insisted that as ambassadors of the Prophetic way we must not leave behind our mess for others to clear up, and must set a good example for others to follow.

A Visit to Eyup Sultan

Next we visited the resting place of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari ﵁, who occupied a prominent and very special position amongst the blessed Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, being the first to host the Messenger of Allah ﷺ after his arrival in Madinah Munawwarah. Since it was the weekend, the place was teeming with people, including both locals and tourists. The Turkish people, regardless of their secular appearances and lifestyles, have a deep love and reverence for religious personalities in their hearts. We learnt that many newly-wed couples came straight from their *nikah* ceremonies to begin their lives together with the blessings of the final resting place of the Companion of the Prophet ﷺ, known to them as Eyup Sultan. The Ottomans held this place in such high esteem that no Ottoman caliph was permitted to take office until he was girded with the sword of Osman Ghazi at this sacred site. The area of Eyup also has a deep connection with the *Naqshbandi tariqah*, as one of the *khulafa* of Khwaja UbaydUllah Ahrar ﵁—Baba Haydar Samarqandi ﵀—settled in Eyup and is buried here.

We gave our respects at his burial site, and despite the rush of people, found a remarkably calm and peaceful place to make *dua*. This was not the first time we had been thus accommodated in crowded spaces when with Hazrat. We remembered the time we traveled with Hazrat

to Syria. In the graveyard of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ in Damascus, members of the group initially went without Hazrat to pay their respects at the tomb of Hazrat Bilal رضي الله عنه; Hazrat had decided to wait for us close to the entrance of the graveyard, finding the long walk to the grave difficult. The site was teeming with people and we made our way in with great difficulty, being forced out by the incoming mob after only a few moments. Later, the driver took us to another entrance which was much closer to the blessed resting place, from where it was possible for Hazrat to walk over, and he decided to do so. As soon as Hazrat walked in, the other visitors started leaving the room until we were the only people remaining besides the grave. At the same place where we had found it difficult to stand for long enough to read the *Fatiha*, we now sat in *muraqabah* and were led in *dua* by Hazrat, without even being disturbed. Later when we mentioned to Hazrat the stark difference between our experience at the gravesite with and without him, he smiled and said, "Allah سبحانه وتعالى showed mercy towards the weak." So here again, amidst a sea of people, we raised our hands in unison with his, hoping that Allah سبحانه وتعالى would shower us *faqirs* with the same blessings that His *wali* was asking of Him.

Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari رضي الله عنه

His full name was Khalid bin Zaid bin Kulayb رضي الله عنه and he belonged to the tribe of Banu Najjar in Madinah Munawwarah and was thus a relative of the Prophet ﷺ from his blessed mother's side of the family.

When the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah Munawwarah, he was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Muslims of the blessed city. This was the moment they had all been waiting for, and they wanted to give him the most generous reception. He entered the city on his camel, and the chieftains of the city stood along his path, each one wishing that the Prophet ﷺ would choose him as his initial host. One after the other they stood in the camel's way beseeching the Prophet ﷺ to stay with them. The Prophet ﷺ would ask them to leave the camel alone, indicating that it was being directed by Allah ﷻ.

The camel continued walking, closely followed by the eyes and hearts of the people of city. When it went past a house, its owner would feel sad and disappointed, while those whose houses were still to come on the route would become hopeful. The camel continued in this manner until it hesitated in an open space in front of the house of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari رضي الله عنه. But the Prophet ﷺ did not get down immediately. Shortly thereafter, the camel set off again, the Prophet ﷺ leaving its reins loose. Before long, however, it turned round, retraced its steps and halted at the same spot as before. Hazrat Abu Ayub رضي الله عنه's joy was beyond words. He greeted the Prophet ﷺ with great enthusiasm and took his luggage in his arms, as if carrying the most precious treasure in the world.

Hazrat Abu Ayub رضي الله عنه's house had two floors. He cleared the upper floor, removing his belongings so that his most venerable guest could stay there. But the Prophet ﷺ preferred to stay on the lower floor. When he retired for the night, Hazrat Abu Ayub رضي الله عنه went to the upper floor to sleep. But upon closing the door, he turned to his wife and said: "Woe to us! What have we done? The Messenger of God ﷺ is below and we are higher than he! Can we walk on top of the

Messenger of God ﷺ? Do we come between him and the Revelation? If so, then we are doomed."

The couple became very worried at what they considered improper etiquette and at the prospect of interrupting the revelation. They moved to the side of the building which did not fall directly above the Prophet ﷺ and were careful to walk along the edges of the floor and avoid the middle. In the morning, Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ said to the Prophet ﷺ, "By God, we did not sleep a wink last night, neither I nor Umm Ayub." When the Prophet ﷺ asked why, Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ explained their concerns. The Prophet ﷺ put him at ease and explained that he preferred the lower floor because it was convenient for the many people who came to visit him.

They submitted to the Prophet's wishes until one cold night a jar of water broke and its contents spilled on the upper floor. They stared at the water in horror, and used the one blanket they had to quickly mop up the water out of fear that it would seep through the floor and fall upon the Prophet ﷺ. In the morning Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ went to his esteemed guest and narrated what had happened, pleading before him to switch floors. The Prophet ﷺ accepted his wish and moved upstairs.

The Prophet ﷺ stayed in Hazrat Abu Ayub's house for almost seven months until his mosque was completed on the piece of land where his camel had initially stopped, which was bought for the purpose by Hazrat Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq ؓ from the two orphan boys that owned it. He then shifted to the private quarters constructed around the mosque for him and his family, thus becoming Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ's neighbor.

Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ continued to love the Prophet ﷺ with all his heart, and the Prophet ﷺ also loved him dearly. There was no formality between them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ continued to regard Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ's house as his own. One day Hazrat Abu Bakr ؓ left his house in the scorching heat of the afternoon and headed for the mosque. Hazrat Umar ؓ saw him and asked, "Abu Bakr, what has

brought you out at this hour?" Hazrat Abu Bakr ﷺ explained that he had been driven out of his house by painful pangs of hunger; Hazrat Umar ﷺ informed him that he had left his house for the same reason. The Prophet ﷺ came up to them and asked them what had brought them out at this hour. They told him, upon which he responded, "By Him in Whose hands is my soul, only hunger has caused me to come out also. But come with me."

They went to the house of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari ﷺ. His wife opened the door and said, "Welcome to the Prophet ﷺ and whoever is with him." The Prophet ﷺ inquired about Hazrat Abu Ayub ﷺ's whereabouts and was informed that he was not at home. However, he was working in a nearby palm grove and when he learnt of the Prophet ﷺ's arrival, he hurriedly returned home. "Welcome to the Prophet ﷺ and whoever is with him," he said. Hazrat Abu Ayub ﷺ would keep some food for the Prophet ﷺ every day, and only when the Prophet ﷺ had not come for it by a certain time would he give it to his family. "Oh Prophet of Allah ﷺ, this is not the time that you usually come," he questioned. "You are right," the Prophet ﷺ affirmed. Hazrat Abu Ayub ﷺ understood the reason for the visit; he went to his garden and cut a cluster of dates which included both ripe and half-ripe dates. "I did not want you to cut this," said the Prophet ﷺ referring to the half-ripe dates, fearing that Hazrat Abu Ayub ﷺ had deprived himself of future profit by bringing them for him; "could you not have brought only the ripe dates?"

"O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, please eat from both the *rutb* (ripe dates) and the *busr* (half ripe dates). I shall slaughter an animal for you also."

"If you are going to, then do not kill one that gives milk," cautioned the Prophet ﷺ, worried about the fate of the calves that depended on their mother's milk for nourishment.

Hazrat Abu Ayub ﷺ slaughtered a young goat, cooked half and grilled the other half. He also asked his wife to bake something, because she baked well. When the food was ready, he placed it before the Prophet ﷺ and his two Companions. The Prophet ﷺ took a

piece of meat, placed it in some bread and said, "Abu Ayub, take this to Fatima. She has not tasted the like of this for days."

When they had eaten until they were satiated, the Prophet ﷺ said reflectively, "Bread and meat, and *busr* and *rutb*!" Tears began to flow from his eyes as he continued, "this is a bountiful blessing about which you will be asked on the Day of Judgment. If such comes your way, put your hands to it and say بسم الله (In the name of Allah) and when you have finished say, الحمد لله الذي هو اشبعنا وانعم علينا (Praise be to Allah Who has satiated us and has bestowed His bounty upon us). This is best."

Such was Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ's good fortune, to be host to the Best of Creation ﷺ and to serve him in his time of need. We have learnt from our *Shaykh* that a *dua* made in relevance to a situation we are in is more likely to be accepted. So we prayed at the grave of this special Companion to also grant us the special honor of serving His chosen people, the inheritors of the Prophet ﷺ.

Much of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari ؓ's life was spent in the path of Allah ﷻ. It was said of him that the only thing that kept him from participating in a battle fought by the Muslims from the time of the Prophet ﷺ to the time of *Ameer* Mu'awiyah ؓ was his engagement at the same time in another. The last campaign in which he took part was the one sent by *Ameer* Mu'awiyah ؓ to open Constantinople for Islam. Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ at that time was a very old man, almost eighty years old, but that did not prevent him from joining the army. Shortly after the campaign began, Hazrat Abu Ayub ؓ fell ill and had to withdraw from fighting. The commander of the army came to him and asked him if he had any last wishes. He replied, "Convey my *salaams* to the Muslim armies and say to them that Abu Ayub urges you to penetrate deeply into the territory of the enemy as far as you can go; that you should carry him with you and bury him under the walls of Constantinople." Thereafter, he breathed his last. The Muslim army fulfilled the desire of this great Companion of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. They pushed back the enemy until they reached the walls of Constantinople. The Muslims besieged the city for four years but

eventually had to withdraw after suffering heavy losses; however, they were able to bury Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari ﵁ as per his last wish. It is said that such *noor* emanated from his burial site that in years to come even Christians would visit it for the attainment of blessing.

The King of Hearts at Eyup Sultan

As we left the complex mosque after praying *Asr*, we were mobbed by dozens of fellow-visitors to the shrine including traditional Turkish students of sacred knowledge. They completely encircled us, trying to touch Hazrat, attempting to shake and kiss his hands. They were helplessly drawn towards him by the magnetic pull that his heart cast on their hearts, without themselves understanding the reason for this attraction. One persistent old lady even insisted on trying to touch him for *barakah* and it took a lot of effort on our part to shield him from her attempts!

We eased our way out of the enthusiastic crowd and quickened our pace towards our bus. We headed straight for our hotel to prepare for our overnight trip to Konya, the scene of one of the greatest love stories of all times, between Maulana Rumi ﵀ and his *Shaykh*, Shamsuddin Tabriz ﵀, and between Maulana Rumi ﵀ and his Lord. We were all looking forward to this visit of one king of hearts to another and thought to ourselves,

خوب گزرے گی جو مل بیٹھیں گے دیوانے دو

Oh what a spectacle it will be when two lovers (of Allah) come together. . .

Journey to Konya

The flight to Konya was short and sweet, which was a real blessing considering how exhausted we all were. As soon as we landed in Konya,

a strange, sweet feeling enveloped our hearts; it was as if the love of Allah ﷻ perfumed the very air of this city. Upon reaching our hotel in Konya, we headed straight for our rooms and retired for the night. From the windows of our hotel rooms we could see the turquoise dome atop Maulana Rumi's tomb, and what a beautiful sight it was.

It was very difficult to sleep that night as there was a strange spiritual attraction that kept pulling our hearts to Maulana Rumi's *khanqah,* and we eagerly awaited the morning to visit the sanctuary about which Maulana Rumi himself claimed:

> This place is the Ka'aba of lovers
> Those who enter it with deficiencies, become complete.

As we gazed out of our window at the unusually attractive dome atop the Maulana's *khanqah,* we were reminded of the verse that Hazrat recited when he set foot on the Blessed *Koh-e-Tur* (Mount Sinai) in Egypt:

میں کہاں کہاں نہ پہنچا تیری دید کی طلب میں

> Where did I not travel in search of You...

Day 4

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi ﵀

The seventh century was a time when *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* (Islamic theology) dominated discourse throughout the Muslim world, to the extent that anyone who could not partake in a discussion on Islamic doctrine was considered uneducated. In the absence of spiritual theologians like Imam Razi and Imam Ghazzali, this debate was often reduced to a redundant exchange of empty words, which failed to satisfy probing intellects or provide peace to restless hearts. The spirit of Islam, wherein lay the real strength of this *Ummah*, was missing. In this time, Allah ﷻ inspired Maulana Rumi with the language of love to revive dead hearts and light the fire of Divine love in the hearts of not just his contemporaries, but of seekers for centuries to come.

His name was Muhammad, his title Jalaluddin, and he became known to the world as Maulana Rumi. He was born on the sixth of *Rabi ul Awwal*, in 604 AH in a family of religious scholars and noblemen in the city of Balkh in Khurasan, Mazar-e-Sharif in present-day Afghanistan. His father Baha-uddin Walad, who traced his lineage from Hazrat Abu Bakr as-Siddiq ﵁, later moved to Anatolia, once the base of the Eastern Roman Empire, in the wake of the Mongol invasion; it is because of his association with Anatolia (known as

Rum in Turkish and Persian) that Maulana Jalaluddin came to be known as al-Rumi. Circumstances forced his father to migrate with the family to Konya in 626 AH. His father, Muhammad Baha-uddin was a renowned scholar and *Shaykh* who ensured that his son received a sound education from a young age, and Maulana Rumi continued this pursuit of knowledge after his father's death, travelling to Syria, which was then a major center of knowledge in the Muslim world. Upon his return from Damascus, he began teaching in Konya, which replaced Damascus as the new center of knowledge after the death of *Shaykh* Ibn-e-Arabi, attracting scholars and seekers from his circle as well as those fleeing troubles in the East. His *madrasah* had more than 400 students, and he delivered sermons amongst many more, and was also involved in issuing legal rulings.

His teaching and legal career continued to flourish, until in 642 AH, a fateful encounter with a wandering dervish from Persia caused a spiritual revolution in his inner life. As he, himself, was to later say,

مولوی ہرگز نہ شد مولائے روم
تا غلام شمس تبریزی نہ شد

Maulavi did not become Maulana Rumi
Until he became the slave of Shams Tabriz.

Born Muhammad bin Ali bin Malik Daad, Shams Tabriz ؒ from an early age carried within his heart the flame of love for Allah ﷻ. He had not yet reached puberty when his state of preoccupation with the remembrance of his Beloved was such that he went without food for up to forty days at a stretch. Shams Tabriz ؒ yearned to find a soul-mate worthy of his companionship, of becoming his spiritual inheritor. He travelled far and wide in his search, concealing his identity from those he encountered along the way, but all in vain. He told his *Shaykh*, Baba Kamal ؒ, that he had a lot on his chest which he could not adequately

express in words, and was told that he was soon to meet a person who will become his 'tongue'. Finally, his *Shaykh* advised him to visit Rum, for there he would find a heart that he could fill with light from his own, the one through whom his state would find expression.

Thereafter Shams Tabriz رحمه الله travelled to Konya and took up residence in a neighborhood of sugar merchants. Regarding the first encounter between the ocean of Divine love and *ma'rifah* (knowledge) and the thirsty seeker, it is reported that one day Maulana Rumi was riding his horse on the way to the mosque when Shams Tabriz رحمه الله stopped him and asked: "Tell me, who is greater, Bayazid Bustami رحمه الله or Muhammad ﷺ?" Maulana Rumi's answer was obvious, that Muhammad ﷺ is the best of creation, how then can he even be compared to Bayazid Bustami رحمه الله who, despite his stature as a scholar, was only an *ummati*? Shams Tabriz رحمه الله replied: "The Prophet ﷺ said ما عرفناك حق معرفتك (We were not able to know you, oh Allah, the way You deserve to be known), whereas Bayazid Bustami declared سبحاني ما اعظم شأني (Oh how great is my achievement (in knowing Him)!"). Maulana Rumi, who was a great scholar of the *Shariah* but had not yet deeply understood *sulook*, was perturbed by this response, and requested Shams Tabriz رحمه الله for further elaboration. Shams Tabriz رحمه الله then explained that the difference is on account of each person's capacity. Muhammad ﷺ had an unlimited capacity to drink from the river of *ma'rifah*, so no matter how much he drank, it seemed meager in comparison with how much could be obtained. But Bayazid رحمه الله had a much more limited capacity compared to the Prophet ﷺ, so after drinking only a glass of that spiritual wine, he felt satiated.

Another day, Maulana Rumi was reading under the shade of a tree by a river, a pile of books besides him—according to one variation he was teaching a group of his students with a pile of hand-written notes next to him— when Shams Tabriz رحمه الله came by. He asked Maulana what was going on and he replied 'This is *qaal* (words), something you cannot understand'. Shams Tabriz رحمه الله then took Maulana's precious books and threw them in the water. Maulana was aghast. Shams

Tabriz ؒ then recited *Bismillah* and pulled the books out of the water and dusted the water off them as if he was dusting sand; the pages thus dried and Maulana saw that the ink on them had not run despite having been soaked in water. Maulana was amazed and asked incredulously, what is this. 'This is *haal* (spiritual state), something you cannot understand,' replied Shams Tabriz ؒ.

These *tawajjuh*-laden words of Shams Tabriz ؒ changed Maulana Rumi's life forever. He was deeply affected and took Shams Tabriz ؒ to the house of his close friend Salahuddin Zarkub, where they remained in isolation with each other for 40 days— 6 months according to some accounts—with no one being allowed to intrude except the host. There, in the company of his new teacher, Maulana Rumi experienced a spiritual revolution in his inner self.

The result of his intense devotion to his new teacher was a disinterest in his own teaching activities, which greatly irked his students and they turned against Shams Tabriz ؒ. At first, Shams Tabriz ؒ tolerated their animosity but eventually was driven by it to leave Konya unannounced, about a year and four months after initially arriving there. Maulana was traumatized by this sudden departure of his beloved *Shaykh* and, contrary to what his students had hoped for, lost whatever little remaining interest he had in them. As he was later to say:

از فراقت تلخ شد ایام ما
دور شد از جان ما آرام ما

Oh my beloved since you have left me, my life has become bitter,
Restfulness has become far removed from my soul.

He remained completely cut off from people until he received a letter from Shams Tabriz ؒ originating in Damascus, after which he resumed benefitting those of his students who were not involved in

the conspiracy against his teacher. As the voices of dissent quieted down and Maulana Rumi became convinced that it was safe for Shams Tabriz ؒ to return to Konya, he sent his son to Damascus to bring back his teacher. His *Shaykh* returned, and Maulana was overjoyed. During his second stint in Konya, the bonds between *Shaykh* and *murid* (spiritual disciple) grew ever stronger. However, not much time had elapsed before trouble started brewing again, and this time the situation became much worse, involving Maulana's own sons. Shams Tabriz ؒ decided it was again time to leave.

The next morning when Maulana discovered that Shams Tabriz ؒ was again missing, he screamed in anguish. He searched for his teacher everywhere but to no avail. This time around, Maulana completely cut himself off from those who had been involved in driving his *Shaykh* away, and composed some heart-rending pieces of poetry in memory of his teacher. He decided to travel to Syria in search of him, and undertook the journey in the company of a few close companions. There he baffled people by his longing for the one he sought, and they wondered who this Shams Tabriz was, whose absence was driving this notable personality to near-insanity. His search ended in vain.

At this point Maulana came to the realization that he and Shams Tabriz ؒ were not two separate entities; if Shams was the sun, he was a speck in it; if Shams was a river, he was a drop of water in it. The existence of the speck is with the existence of the sun, just as the drop of water owed its wetness to the river of which it was a part. So there was no real difference between the two. With these thoughts, Maulana returned to Konya.

A few years later, the intense love that Maulana felt for his teacher compelled him to undertake another journey to Syria in search of Shams Tabriz ؒ. He returned alone, but with a feeling of oneness with his *Shaykh*, the feeling that the one he had been searching for was, after all, inside his own self. After this, Maulana lost all hope of ever meeting his teacher again, but the spiritual state that he had

observed in Shams Tabriz, he began to find in himself. In the words of Amir Khusro[9],

من تو شدم تو من شدی
من تن شدم تو جان شدی
تاکس نه گوید بعد ازین
من دیگرم تو دیگری

I am you, you are me;
I am the body, you are the soul.
So that no one can say hereafter,
That you are someone else, and I someone else.

Maulana Rumi now made Salahuddin Zarkub his closest companion, a choice that again irked his students and other contenders for this position since Salahuddin Zarkub was an ordinary man in their eyes, with no intellectual achievements to boast of. After Salahuddin Zarkub's death some 10 years later, this intimacy was enjoyed by Maulana's closest *murid* and *khalifa*, *Shaykh* Hisamuddin. It was during this period, with the support and encouragement of *Shaykh* Hisamuddin, that Maulana Rumi composed his magnum opus, the *Mathnavi*.

It is reported that prior to Maulana's death, Konya was jolted by earthquakes for forty days. When people approached him regarding this, Maulana indicated that the earth was hungry for him. During the illness that became the cause of his death, some other religious elders of the area came to visit him and prayed for his swift recovery. He

9 Amir Khusro was the beloved *murid* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya ﷺ, one of the most prominent Chishti saints of the Indian sub-continent. The love between this *shaykh* and *murid* is legendary; Nizamuddin Awliya ﷺ is himself reported to have said that if the *Shariah* had allowed for it, he would have willed for him and Amir Khusro to be buried in the same grave.

responded by saying that there was just a thin barrier remaining between a lover and his Beloved; do you not wish for it to be removed, so that light may be merged with light? As one of the pious predecessors said:

الموت جسر يوصل الحبيب إلى الحبيب

Death is a bridge that unites one lover with another.

Maulana Rumi ﷺ passed away on the 5th of *Jamad ul Awwal*, 672 AH at the age of 68. His body was accompanied by so many people to its final resting place that it took from morning to evening for it to reach the graveyard. As Iqbal said:

نہ اٹھا پھر کوئی رومی عجم کے لالہ زاروں سے

وہی آب و گل ایران وہی تبریز ہے ساقی

No Rumi was born again from the orchards of the non-Arab world
The clay and water of Persia are the same and the same Tabriz is the thirst-quencher.

Visit to Maulana Rumi ﷺ's Shrine

Maulana Rumi ﷺ's former *khanqah* was converted into a museum in 1927 and today functions as both museum and shrine. In its main room, the *Mevlana Turbesi*, is the tomb of Maulana ﷺ, covered with a large velvet cloth embroidered in gold. The tombs of Maulana Rumi ﷺ's father, son and other *mashaikh* are clustered around his grave. Their graves are capped with huge turbans to mark their elevated status.

As we entered Maulana Rumi ﷺ's *khanqah*, a Turkish guide approached us and offered us his services. Although Hazrat is usually very interested in history and historical artifacts, at this point he did not seem intrigued by a guided tour of the *khanqah*. Instead, he pushed

this *faqir* forward to interact with the guide so that the guide's feelings would not be hurt. Allah knows best, but it seemed as if Hazrat's heart had now tuned into a different reality. As we moved to Maulana Rumi ﵀'s tomb, we quickly read *Surat-al-fatiha* and moved on to the museum, as the area around his tomb was crowded by tourists.

The museum exhibits a large number of items associated with the Maulana's life. They include silver keys, copies of the noble Qur'an, and lamps and robes used by the Maulana. There are also a number of prayer-mats. A large hand-written copy of the *Mathnavi* of the Maulana is displayed in the hall. Within one room there is a casket containing a hair from the beard of the Prophet ﷺ.

After quickly finishing the museum tour, Hazrat unexpectedly told this *faqir* that he wanted to do *muraqabah*, and that we should find a place near Maulana for this purpose. Now, I was worried. Where were we going to find a place to do *muraqabah* amidst these throngs of tourists where just a short while ago it was difficult even to stand for *Fatiha*? Furthermore, how were we going to convince the strict security guards that we needed to sit down close to Maulana's tomb for *zikr*?

But Allah ﷻ opened the way for us as he always does when we are with Hazrat. As our group moved closer to Maulana's resting place, the tourists began to move back. Hazrat sat next to the resting place and lowered his head for *muraqabah*. We followed his example and tried to drown ourselves in the remembrance of Allah ﷻ, intoxicated by the strange feeling that prevailed throughout this city of lovers and was most intense besides this Chief of Lovers. Throughout the *muraqabah*, the tourists stared at Hazrat leading us in *zikr*. Amazingly, even the security guards who we feared would ask us to get up, instead watched and guarded over us the entire time we sat there.

After *muraqabah*, Hazrat lifted his head and hands and made one of the most beautiful *duas* we had ever heard him make. We raised our hands along with him, while Hazrat beseeched Allah ﷻ to accept our attendance at this blessed place, to fill our hearts with His *'ishq* and include us in the ranks of His true lovers, to fill our hearts with his *ma'rifah* and include us in the ranks of his *a'rifeen* (knowers of Allah ﷻ).

With tears in our eyes, we made our way out of the *khanqah* into the gardens. There, our Turkish guide excitedly insisted that he wanted to show me something very special. Hazrat encouraged me to oblige him and the guide led me through what seemed like a maze of gardens to a plaque that read "Muhammad Iqbal".

The guide explained that although Iqbal was not buried here in Konya, as he was a spiritual son of Maulana, the authorities wanted to honour him through this plaque. Iqbal himself acknowledged his spiritual debt to Maulana Rumi ﵀ in several verses, including these ones in *Asrar-i-Khudi*,

جان او از شعله ها سرمایه دار
من فروغ یک نفس مثل شرار
شمع سوزان تاخت بر پروانه ام
باده شبخون ریخت بر پیمانه ام
پیر رومی خاک را اکسیر کرد
از غبارم جلوه ها تعمیر کرد

His soul is the flaming furnace,
    I am but as the spark that gleams for a moment,
His burning candle consumed me - the moth;
    His wine overwhelmed my goblet,
The master of Rum transmuted my earth to gold
    And set my ashes aflame.

Towards the end of our tour of the museum, the guide explained that this complex served as the *khanqah* of Maulana Rumi ﵀, and that *murids* would come here from far and wide for their correction. Any new *murid* would follow a set regimen of service in order to erase his *nafs*, which first included forty days of looking after the cattle of the *khanqah*. Then, for forty days, the *murid* would sweep the doorsteps of the other *murids'* rooms with a broom. Then, the next forty days would be spent in drawing water from the well for the residents of the *khanqah*. Similar forty day periods would be spent in other tasks such as serving in the *khanqah*'s kitchen as a cook and being responsible

for buying groceries for the *khanqah*. After passing through all these stages, the *murid* would take a bath and repent from his past life. Then, he would be taught the *zikr* of the *tariqah*.

When *Shaykh* Husain Abdul Sattar (db) heard this, he requested Hazrat to make *dua* that Allah ﷻ bless them with such a *khanqah* in America, so that those who are spiritually diseased may have a spiritual hospital to come to in order to cure themselves of their ailments.

Before we left the *khanqah*, Hazrat drew our attention to a plaque on top of the doorway of the *khanqah* which read:

This place is the Ka'aba of lovers,
 Those who come here with deficiencies, become complete.

Visit to Shams Tabriz's ؒ Shrine

From the shrine of Maulana Rumi ؒ we went by bus to what is known as the shrine of Hazrat Shams Tabriz ؒ. While the site may indeed have been a place where the great *Shaykh* spent some time, the claim of it being his final resting place is unverified. The truth is that no one really knows where this lover of Allah ﷻ went after he left Konya, and which land was blessed to be his final resting place.

A Moth around a Flame

As we were exiting the shrine, a Turkish man came up to Hazrat and began going round and round him as if doing *tawaf*, like a moth circling a flame in loving devotion. His action was very inappropriate and made Hazrat and the rest of us very uncomfortable, but we understood that he found no other way of expressing the extent of his love.

We had by now become accustomed to the unusual ways in which people responded to the power that this king of hearts wielded on their hearts, and nothing surprised us anymore. Surely the most miraculous demonstration of this power were the dramatic changes in the lives of countless individuals around the globe, who abandoned lives of heedlessness and sin and adopted a life of adherence to the *Shariah* and *Sunnah* after meeting Hazrat. As one poet rightly said,

نگاہ ولی میں وہ تاثیر دیکھی
بدلتی ہزاروں کی تقدیر دیکھی

The effect of the glance of a Wali is such
That we have seen the destiny of thousands change with it.

In truth, it is this *tawajjuh* of our *Shaykh* that us *fuqara* came to Turkey seeking, for one never knows when and where that decisive moment may come when one meaningful glance completely changes the world of our hearts forever.

Maulana Rumi ﵀'s Spiritual Stature

After the visits to Maulana Rumi ﵀ and Shams Tabriz ﵀, Hazrat said that he sensed an incredible amount of *anwaaraat* (spiritual illumination) at Maulana Rumi's tomb (during the *muraqabah*), an indication

that his *faiz* (spiritual benefit) had truly spread very far and wide. Hazrat explained that throughout the centuries, countless ‘*ulema* and *mashaikh* had benefited from Maulana’s poetry, and in turn they had benefitted innumerable others. Hazrat said that this happens when someone serves the *deen* of Allah ﷿ with complete *ikhlaas* (sincerity), as Maulana Rumi ﵀ had done.

Abandoned Traditional Schools of Learning

After leaving the *khanqah*, we made a quick tour by bus of other places of historical significance in Konya. We quickly stopped by several now-abandoned traditional schools of learning. These were the palaces of knowledge where once the Qur’an was memorized, the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ and *fiqh* was taught, and where the hearts of students of sacred knowledge were illuminated.

It was very sad to see that these schools of learning had now been abandoned.

تیری محفل بھی گئی چاہنے والے بھی گئے
شب کی آہیں بھی گئیں صبح کے نالے بھی گئے

دل تجھے دے بھی گئے اپنا صلہ لے بھی گئے
آکے بیٹھے بھی نہ تھے اور نکالے بھی گئے

Your gathering is gone, and Your lovers have all left
The night's sighs are gone and the dawn's wailings can no longer be heard
They had given You their hearts, they have reaped their rewards
They had hardly settled down when they were made to leave.

This *faqir* was reminded of the time we were in Cairo with Hazrat and had just exited *Masjid* al-Hussein ﵁, which is located in Old Cairo. In this part of Cairo, we were amazed to see row after row of old abandoned *madrasahs* and asked Hazrat about this. Hazrat remarked that this used to be the neighborhood of the '*ulema* in centuries past. However, the descendants of these '*ulema* abandoned these palaces of knowledge, and these schools were now empty. Hazrat then said that when we visit other parts of the Muslim world, we cannot help but appreciate the tremendous efforts and sacrifices that have been made by our '*ulema*—the '*ulema* of Deoband— in repeatedly reviving the *deen* and the schools of sacred knowledge. It is because of the sacrifices of these elders in the deen that even today these gardens and palaces of knowledge continue to flourish in our native lands, and are filled with the melodious voices of seekers of sacred knowledge.

Our *Naqshbandi Khanqah* in Konya

When we returned to our hotel, Hazrat went straight into his room to rest. Later that evening we went down to the basement of our hotel to offer our *Maghrib* prayers and were joined there by Hazrat.

After we performed out prayers, this little basement was transformed into a *khanqah* and we were blessed with the priceless opportunity to sit at the feet of our beloved *Shaykh*, under his transformative

gaze, and benefit from his knowledge and wisdom. Members of the group took turns to ask Hazrat their questions, and Hazrat answered each one patiently, encouraging the quieter members of the group to present their queries, and the more vocal amongst them to give others a chance. It is these moments that us *faqirs* live for, and live by.

Captivated by the extraordinary relationship between Maulana Rumi ﵀ and his teacher, our questions were centered mostly on the relationship between *shaykh* and *murid*, and concerned the spiritual path in general.

Understanding Maulana Rumi ﵀ and the Masnavi

Someone asked for a clarification of what had been written regarding Maulana Rumi ﵀, that he needed a *muharrik*, a companion who would act as a stimulator, so that Maulana's spiritual state might find expression. Hazrat explained that Maulana Rumi's poetry was the poetry of *haal*. So he needed someone with him all the time who could pen the words that flowed from his tongue. Maulana Rumi had become spiritually intoxicated (*mast*) in his state, and such a person is not able to do things for himself, he needs a helper to be productive. A helper, Hazrat explained, was a more appropriate way of understanding the role played by his close companions.

Hazrat then elaborated that because the *Mathnavi* contained so many fine points of *tasawwuf*, it served as a treasure of *ma'rifah* for many *salasil* (spiritual chains). Those seekers who did not have the opportunity to learn the *sulook* from their *mashaikh* would fill in the gaps with the wisdom contained in the verses of Maulana Rumi ﵀. It was for this reason that Muhammad Iqbal referred to Maulana Rumi ﵀ as *Peer-e-Rumi*, and to himself the as the *Murid-e-Hindi*. *Mashaikh* of the *Naqshbandi silsila*, however, took more from the *Maktubaat* (letters) of *Imam-e-Rabbani*, Hazrat *Mujaddid Alf-e-Sani, Shaykh* Ahmed Sirhindi.

The questioner then asked regarding Maulana Rumi's choice of close companions, his preference for those of the same personality type as him, and his claim that in relationships with people who are at the same mental wavelength as oneself, there is little remorse. Hazrat explained that Maulana Rumi preferred the closeness and companionship of those with whom his personality matched. Where there was a matching of personalities, love flowed naturally and there would be less formality, and all problems between people arose because of formality. The love that flowed naturally between two hearts was durable, and with such love there were fewer chances of causing or getting hurt. Hence the foundation of love is the matching of personalities.

Referring to the verse inscribed at the entrance of Maulana Rumi's shrine, "*This place is the Ka'aba of lovers; those who come here with deficiencies, become complete,*" someone asked if this transformation was limited to the time of Maulana Rumi or could be attained by visiting his *khanqah* even now. Hazrat explained that the *khanqah* of this *Syed-ul-'Ushaaq* (Chief of the Lovers) was a place where seekers found the love of Allah ﷻ in his company during his lifetime. However, the effects of the lovers of Allah ﷻ linger on in the places associated with them in times to come.

On the Capacity to Accept Spiritual Benefit

Someone asked how it was possible that Maulana Rumi ؒ could attain so much spiritual benefit from Shams Tabriz ؒ in such a short period of time. Hazrat responded by saying that *faiz* can actually be transferred in an even shorter amount of time, in a matter of mere moments. He explained that Maulana Rumi ؒ had immense God-given capacity to receive *faiz*; he merely needed to be triggered in order to rise to great heights. Hazrat explained that different people have different natural capacities; some are like 50 watt bulbs, some

150, some 250 and so on. The more capacity a person has, the quicker and more complete is the transfer of *faiz* from teacher to student. Maulana Rumi was like a 500 watt bulb who just needed the button to be turned on, which is what Shams Tabriz ﵀ did.

Hazrat further elaborated that the capacity to accept spiritual benefit is dependent on five things: *zikr, ilm* (knowledge)*, aajizi* (humility), *husn-e-khulq* (moral character)*, khidmat-e-Shaykh* (service of the *Shaykh*). All these are subsumed under the three principles of our *silsilah*, namely *zikr*, *ittiba-e-Sunnah* (following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ) and *muhabbat-e-Shaykh* (love of the *Shaykh*), the first one being the fuel that drives our spiritual progress and the latter two being the wings with which we can fly towards Allah ﷻ. The questioner asked if any of these can be omitted, and Hazrat in return asked rhetorically if flying was possible if one wing was cut off; *zikr-e-ilahi*, *itteba-e-sunnat*, and *muhabbat-e-shaykh* are all necessary for progress on the *sulook*, he reiterated.

The questioner then referred to the story of Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀ and his *murid*, a bread maker who would bring bread for his *Shaykh* everyday at mealtime. One day it was raining heavily and Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀ did not expect this *murid* to bring bread for him in this extreme weather, when suddenly there was a knock at the door. Upon opening the door, Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀ discovered his dedicated student standing outside, soaking wet, bearing bread for his *Shaykh*. Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀ was so moved by this act of love shown by his *murid* that he asked the man what he wanted in return. The intelligent student told Hazrat that he wanted to be just like him. Hazrat hugged him and transferred the *noor* of *nisbat* from his heart into the heart of his *murid*. It is said that as a result the *murid* became so much like his teacher, he even began to resemble him physically.

The questioner asked how it was possible for this *murid* of Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀ to benefit so much and so quickly from his *shaykh* when, unlike Maulana Rumi ﵀, he did not seem to have the capacity to receive these spiritual treasures. Hazrat explained that sometimes

Allah ﷻ decides that *nisbat* has to be transferred into a person and makes the *shaykh* a means for this transfer. He creates such a state in the heart of the *shaykh* that he is compelled to transfer what is in his heart into the heart of his *murid*, whether he had initially intended to or not, and despite absence of capacity in the student. Sometimes, Hazrat said, the *shaykh* himself cries and begs Allah ﷻ to allow him to transfer *nisbat* to a particular *murid*. Hazrat gave the example of Hazrat *Mujaddid Alf-e-Sani*, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sirhindi ؒ, who beseeched Allah ﷻ for permission to transfer the *noor* of *nisbat* into a *murid*, Maulana Tahir Lahori ؒ about whom he himself said that he saw the word '*badnaseeb*' (wretched) written on his face. The result of this pleading by his *shaykh* was that this *murid* of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sirhindi attained the *noor* of the *nisbat* from his *Shaykh*. Hence, Hazrat advised that a *salik* must aim to win the favor of Allah ﷻ; the *maqbool* of Allah ﷻ was the *maqbool* of the Prophet ﷺ, the *maqbool* of the *shaykh*, the *maqbool* of all of creation. When asked how one could win the pleasure of Allah ﷻ so that He makes the *Shaykh* the means for attainment of the *noor* of *nisbat*, Hazrat replied that this could be done through acts of worship and *dua*s. The highest act of worship, Hazrat added, was leaving sin.

Hazrat mentioned that there were two other questions that were relevant here. First, as the story continues, the bread-maker *murid* of Hazrat Baqi Billah ؒ died within three days of attaining *nisbat* from his *Shaykh*. One can ask why this happened. The answer, Hazrat explained, is that he did not have the capacity to accept this *nisbat*; he received in an instant what Hazrat Baqi Billah ؒ had attained after a lifetime of hard work. Hazrat gave the example of the growth of a fetus in the womb of its mother. As the fetus grows bigger the womb that carries it expands accordingly, making it easy for the mother to carry the load. However, if a nine-month old fetus was to be implanted in the womb of a woman who was not bearing a child, that woman would not be able to sustain this burden and would die as a result.

The second question, Hazrat explained, is whether the *murid*, given

that he were to die as a result of attaining the *nisbat*, should still have wished for it. Hazrat answered that this *nisbat* was such a blessing that he should have wished for it even at the cost of his life. Hazrat remarked that if we were to attain the *nisbat* of Hazrat Baqi Billah ﵀, we were ready to die this very instant, three days was still a long time.

On the Benefit of Love on the Day of Judgment

Someone else asked how the relationship between *shaykh* and *murid* would help the student on the Day of Judgment. In response Hazrat quoted a verse from the Quran about the Day of Judgment:

الْأَخِلَّاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقِينَ

Friends on that day will be enemies of each other,
except the righteous. (Al-Zukhruf: 67)

Thereafter, he explained that on that fateful day, all the relationships that were for the sake of the *dunya* will be forgotten. However, people will be brought into the Plain of Resurrection (*Maidaan-e-Hashr*) behind their religious leaders. The *Ummah* of the Prophet ﷺ will stand behind him, and within this large group there will be many sub-groups. The followers of Imam Abu Hanifa ﵀, for instance, will be behind him, and the sub-grouping will continue to the extent that all those who prayed the Friday prayer behind a particular Imam will stand behind him on the Day of Judgment. This means that on that Day we will be with those people whom we love, follow, and whose company we keep. Allah ﷻ will merely glance at the people standing behind someone whom He loves, and give them the green light to enter *Jannah*, without asking any questions, for once questioning begins, accountability will be inevitable.

Hazrat then quoted the following Persian verse.

شنیدم که در روز امید و بیم
بداں را بہ نیکاں ببخشد کریم

I have heard that on the day of hope and fear
Allah will forgive the sinners because of the pious.

Hazrat explained that this would be because of their relationship of love with pious people.

Hazrat then quoted the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ,

المرء مع من أحب

A person will be with him who he loves (in the Hereafter).

Hazrat explained that Hazrat Abu Bakr as-Siddiq ؓ will be with the Prophet ﷺ because of his intense love for the Beloved of Allah ﷺ, Hazrat Salman Farsi ؓ will be with Hazrat Siddiq-e-Akbar ؓ for the same reason. Similarly, Hazrat Qasim bin Muhammad bin Abi Bakr ؒ will be with Hazrat Salman Farsi ؓ, and this will continue through our chain of *mashaikh* all the way down to our times. Hazrat said that his *Shaykh*, Hazrat Ghulam Habib ؒ would be with his *Shaykh*, Hazrat Khwaja Abdul Malik Siddiqui ؒ, and Hazrat, because of his love for his *Shaykh* would be with him. For those of us who loved Hazrat for the sake of Allah ﷻ, this love is the only means for us to end up at the feet of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. It is because of the hope that this *hadith* gives that the *Sahaba* said that since entering the fold of Islam they had never been happier than when they heard these words from the blessed mouth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Hazrat quoted a verse of the Quran that further explained this point,

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُم بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُم
مِّنْ عَمَلِهِم مِّن شَيْءٍ ۚ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

> And those who believe and whose children followed them in belief, we shall join their children with them without depriving anyone of the rewards of their deeds. Every individual is in pledge for his deeds. (At-Tur: 21)

Hazrat explained that the glad tidings contained in this verse from the Holy Quran were for both biological as well as spiritual progeny. It is an immense blessing of Allah ﷻ that he has instilled in our hearts love for the pious, for we learn of a person who will be forgiven on the Day of Judgment simply for looking at a *wali* of Allah ﷻ with love. We also learn from a *hadith* that on that Day, out of the seven types of people who will enjoy the shade of the Throne of Allah ﷻ, two will be those who love each other for the sake of Allah ﷻ. The relationship between *Shaykh* and *murid* is one that is purely for the sake of Allah ﷻ and has closeness to Allah ﷻ as its goal for both parties rather than any worldly benefit. So if we keep this relationship strong till our death, this one act alone could be sufficient to attain forgiveness on the Day of Judgment.

Hazrat mentioned that some signs of this *Ummah* were described in the Torah, and one of them was that it would contain people who love each other for the sake of Allah ﷻ. He also referred to a *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ which foretold of people from different places and different tribes who would gather merely for the remembrance of Allah ﷻ and their stature was such that on the Day of Judgment their faces would be radiant and they would be resting on chairs of pearls; although they will be neither the prophets nor from among the martyrs, people would look at them with envy, and long to be in their position.

Hazrat then explained the value of love for Allah ﷻ. He referred to a narration about *Nabi* Musa عليه السلام in which he overheard an old man engaged in conversation with his Lord saying, "Oh Allah, I have heard that you do not have a wife. Oh Allah, were you to come to me I would attend to You. I would serve You food, wash Your clothes, give You

yoghurt, and feed You butter. Oh when You fall ill, who takes care of You?" Prophet Musa reprimanded the old man, explaining that use of such words was disrespectful, insolent, and contrary to the greatness of Allah. As a result the old man began to cry profusely, seeking the forgiveness of Allah. But Allah had appreciated the intensity of the old man's love, regardless of the inappropriate way in which he had expressed his feelings, and instead reprimanded *Nabi* Musa saying, "Oh my dear Messenger, I have sent you to bridge the distance between Me and My creation, not increase it." Hazrat sighed deeply and said that Allah values love so much that he even appreciated the disrespectful words of this old man. If those acts that are contrary to the greatness of Allah are pleasing to Him when done out of love, how happy must He be with those acts of love that befit His most-exalted stature? Even the objects of love in this world cannot help but have a soft corner in their hearts for their lovers, so how much must Allah love those who become so intense in their love for Allah, that according to a Prophetic tradition, people begin to call them insane.

Hazrat mentioned that this feeling of love for Allah was granted only to believers; although the angels were always engrossed in praising and worshipping their Lord, they did so in a mechanical way and were not driven to it by love. It was only believers who could enjoy this feeling to the extreme.

On Attaining the Forgiveness of Allah

Hazrat was then asked about the consequences of sins that are committed unknowingly. Hazrat replied that *istighfaar* was such an invaluable act that it wiped away not only those sins that were committed unknowingly, but also those committed intentionally. Allah is so Merciful that just a feeling of regret that comes into our heart after committing a sin is enough to wipe that sin away. Someone then asked "What if a person does not regret having committed a sin."

Hazrat replied that if one is doing *istighfaar*, some level of remorse is there, for why else would a person be seeking the forgiveness of Allah ﷻ? Regret, he explained, is when a person feels that what he did was wrong, that he should not have done that deed.

On the Paths of the *Nafs* and *Qalb*

The last question was regarding the difference between spiritual diseases that originate in the *nafs* and those that originate in the *qalb*. Hazrat clarified that although the *nafs* and *qalb* (spiritual heart) are different, the former belonging to the *A'alam-e-Khalq*[10] and the latter to the *A'alam-e-Amr*[11], they have a deep connection with each other. The *nafs* is the source of desires, which could be both good (for example the desire to become a *haafiz* or *qari*) and bad (for example the desire for fame and praise). The heart is the source of emotions, for instance the feeling of love for Allah ﷻ, and the emotions of courage, cowardice, generosity, miserliness. The diseases of the *nafs* and *qalb* overlap, but some originate in the *nafs* and their shadow is found in the *qalb*, while others originate in the *qalb* and their shadow is found in the *nafs*. If one of the two is purified, the other will automatically be cured of its diseases; however, the way of purification of both is different.

The way of purification of the *nafs* is the way of those pious predecessors who lived in the early centuries of Islam, in which *mujahada*, struggling against the *nafs,* was adopted as the way of cleansing ones' self of spiritual diseases, and attaining the pleasure and love of Allah

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10 *A'alam-e-Khalq* is that realm which Allah ﷻ created gradually, for instance the earth and skies in six days, and the formation of a child in the womb of the mother over a period of nine months. This realm operates according to natural laws and cause and effect relationships that Allah ﷻ has set in place.

11 *A'alam-e-Amr* is that realm which Allah ﷻ has brought into existence with the utterance of the word '*Kun* (Be).' This includes angels, Heaven, Hell, the *Lawh-e-Mahfuz* (Tablet), and the *Arsh* (Throne) of Allah ﷻ, and is not bound even outwardly by rules and regulations.

ﷺ. Those who have adopted this way towards spiritual advancement have kept themselves far away from everything that pleases the *nafs* even if it is permissible, from good food to fine clothing to engagement with *mehram* women; even the use of air-conditioners in homes was considered undesirable by these *mashaikh*. They used to speak so little that they could write it all down at the end of the day; Hazrat said that if *murids* like us were to start doing this, we would fill entire registers with what we uttered in a single day!

For those who lived in the latter centuries, including the present day, Allah ﷻ has made it easier to achieve the same goal, for the hardships that one had to endure to attain *wilaya* in the past would deter people today from setting foot on this path. Hazrat said that in lieu of our weakness in this day and age, Allah ﷻ has created short-cuts for us; today we are travelers of a subsidized *sulook*! In the *Naqshbandi silsila,* spiritual diseases are cured through purification of the heart, the logic being that if our emotions are rectified, our thoughts and desires will automatically become in accordance with the Will of Allah ﷻ. And the way of correcting our emotions is through *zikr* of Allah ﷻ, *itteba-e-sunnat* and *muhabbat-e-Shaykh*.

However, while this path is easier, the only struggle involved being in submission to the *Shariah*, it is a faster way of attaining the same goal. This is because the *A'alam-e-Amr*, to which the *latifa-e-qalb* belongs, is higher than the *A'alam-e-Khalq* to which the *latifa-e-nafs* belongs. So the path that makes the purification of the heart its primary goal starts from higher ground, and the purification of the *nafs* is automatically attained in its course. Hazrat explained this by using the example of a person who wanted to get to the top floor, starting at the basement. He could either take the stairs up and pass through every stage painstakingly, or he could take the elevator and go directly to the top floor with ease. The way of the *qalb* is similar to taking the elevator to the top floor. Hazrat said that his *Shaykh*, Hazrat Ghulam Habib ؒ said that we are '*fazli*,' (favored) because Allah ﷻ has bestowed His special '*fazl*' (favor) upon us; we can enjoy

the blessings of Allah ﷻ, even live in palace-like homes, and still reach the same spiritual heights that our ancestors achieved by renouncing the pleasures of this world. Hazrat said that we should thank Allah ﷻ that He has made this journey easy for us weaklings in this day and age. Just as today Allah ﷻ has facilitated our physical journeys in light of our physical weakness—a journey that would take a month by horse or camel can be completed today in just an hour—he has also made our spiritual journey easier. Our *silsila*, Hazrat said, is like the plane ride of the spiritual world!

In earlier times, when people had stronger will-power, Allah ﷻ manifested the *Qadiri*, *Chishti*, and *Suharwardi* paths and they spread far and wide; in this time when the believers have lesser determination, Allah ﷻ has granted popularity to the *Naqshbandi* way. Even our elders in the *Naqshbandi* path endured more *mujahada* and hardships in their *sulook* than their spiritual offspring today, because in general, the atmosphere then facilitated such rigor. But Hazrat Bahauddin Naqshband Bukhari رحمه الله cried before Allah ﷻ for years, begging the Almighty to open for him a way that will surely lead to Him, but will be easy to tread. And Allah ﷻ answered his *duas* by opening the *Naqshbandi* path to him. Hazrat said that because of its ease, this *tariqah* will persist till the Day of Judgment.

This hour or so that we thus spent with our *Shaykh* was without doubt the highlight of our entire trip, and each one of us wished that time would stop and we could remain like this forever. However, all too soon Hazrat decided it was time to pack our bags and head for the airport, to catch our flight back to Istanbul.

Return from Konya

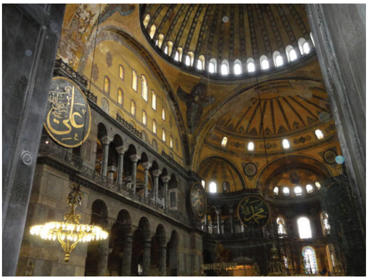
We returned from Konya late that night and headed to bed to get some rest in anticipation of what we expected would be a busy and emotionally draining last day in Istanbul with our dear Hazrat.

Day 5

Visit to the Hagia Sofia (Ayasofya)

Our first stop the next day was the Hagia Sofia, Greek for 'Holy Wisdom,' that bastion of Christianity that was converted to a mosque by Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh ﵀ immediately after he conquered Constantinople. It was the church of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the religious focus point of the Eastern Orthodox Church for nearly a thousand years.

Immediately after the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Hagia Sophia was converted into the Ayasofya Mosque. The bells, altar, iconostasis, and sacrificial vessels were removed, and many of the mosaics were eventually plastered over. Islamic features—such as the *mihrab*, the *minbar*, and the four minarets outside— were added over the course of its history under the Ottomans. It functioned as a mosque until 1935, when it was converted into a museum. The mosaics were then restored to their original state; it was strange for us to see paintings of Jesus and the Virgin Mary and human depictions of angels alongside huge decorative discs bearing the names of Allah ﷻ, His Messenger ﷺ and the four rightly guided caliphs رضي الله عنهم.



When we arrived at the Ayasofya, we noticed that Hazrat did not enter the main hall but instead sat throughout on a cement bench just outside its entrance. As Hazrat sat down, he explained why he did not come in. He said that once a space is designated as a mosque it remains a mosque till the Day of Judgment, even if its use as such is discontinued. Therefore, he could not enter it with his shoes on and did not want to attract unnecessary attention to himself by taking his shoes off and walking inside bare-footed. This *faqir* whispered in Hazrat's ears that *ahadith* speak about a second conquest of Constantinople which will be peaceful, achieved through the *zikr* of *takbeer* and *tahleel*, and if Allah ﷻ gives us the opportunity to return to this place after this second peaceful conquest, perhaps we could pray inside then. Hazrat

immediately said: "We are sitting here and conquering their hearts." After a confused moment it dawned upon this *faqir* that Hazrat was sitting here giving *tawajjuh* to all the visitors.

The Conqueror of Hearts at the Ayasofya

For the next half hour, Hazrat sat on this bench facing the main hall of the Ayasofya. Soon enough there was a repeat of what had happened at Eyup Sultan, only this time it was non-Muslims who lost interest in the artistic wonders and historic treasures that they had come to see, and instead turned their attention towards Hazrat. Many started to photograph him from all angles without even bothering to take his permission. While those who had encircled him at the tomb of Hazrat Abu Ayub al-Ansari were Muslim, here it was the non-Muslim tourists that were attracted to him like flies. *Shaykh* Husain Abdul Sattar (db) and this *faqir* became increasingly uncomfortable with this situation as we knew that Hazrat would not be comfortable with the photography. Finally, we were relieved that Hazrat decided to leave, and as we exited the main door of the building, Hazrat explained their curious behavior saying, "There are two types of *tawajjuh*, one is for Muslims, to increase their practice of the *deen* and to bring them closer to Allah ﷻ, and the second type is to bring non-Muslims towards the *deen*. Every person whose heart forced them to take a picture here will later experience its spiritual impact. They were compelled by their hearts to do so because of the spiritual attraction they felt; the attraction was not sexual since they have all such fulfillment that they want. They were feeling a spiritual attraction because of *tawajjuh* that they could not resist."

This *faqir* was reminded of a similar experience from our trip to Egypt. During our visit to Mount Sinai, the head of the security staff at the monastery there himself offered to pluck for us a few leaves

from the 'Burning Bush' ('*Shajar-e-Tajalli*') and asked us to sit on a nearby bench in the meanwhile. He had seen through his security camera that just a short while ago when Hazrat had sat near the site of the 'Burning Bush' to do *muraqabah*, all the visitors had lost interest in the 'Burning Bush' and had turned their attention towards Hazrat, snapping away with their cameras. He requested Hazrat to sit there again so that he may take advantage of the diverted attention of the visitors to break off a few leaves from the 'Burning Bush.' His plan worked and as soon as we sat down, the tourists turned their attention towards Hazrat and started photographing him from all sides, leaving the coast clear for the security officer to execute his plan.

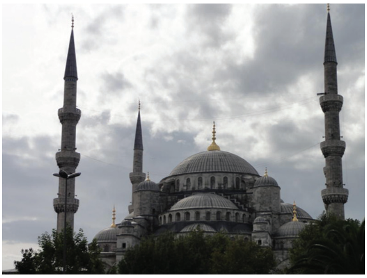
As we walked through the gardens of the Ayasofya, Hazrat explained how those who took pictures would feel its spiritual impact later on. Hazrat shared with us his experience from when he was in Russia many years ago. While on a boat trip, he sat down and became engrossed in *zikr* when a local Russian started taking pictures of him. Those around Hazrat tried to stop the enthusiastic photographer, but in vain. The Russian continued snapping pictures, finishing reel after reel. Later, one of Hazrat's companions went up to the photographer to obtain a contact number. After several months, this photographer was contacted and the first thing the Russian asked was regarding who Hazrat was. The *murid* explained that Hazrat is our spiritual guide and the Russian informed him that he had become Muslim just by later looking at the pictures of Hazrat taken on that fateful boat ride.

When we reached the gardens of the Ayasofya, an Algerian man, a complete stranger, came up to us and said *salaam*, and introduced to Hazrat the baby that was in his arms. Hazrat asked the man regarding the name of his son. "Muhammad," he replied. Hazrat gave the baby a kiss on the cheek and said "We always show our love to any baby whose name is Muhammad."

We then made our way towards another historic monument just walking distance from the Ayasofya.

Visit to Sultan Ahmed Mosque

Our next stop was the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, one of the most beautiful mosques in the world, popularly known as the Blue Mosque because of the blue tiles adorning its interior, which overlooks the Ayasofya Mosque.



One of the most notable features of the Blue Mosque is its six minarets. This is very unique, as most mosques in Turkey have four, two, or just one minaret. According to one account, the Sultan directed his architect to make gold (*altin*) minarets, but he instead made six (*alti*) minarets. At that time, the only mosque with six minarets was *Masjid-ul-Haraam* in Makkah Mukarramah. When the Sultan found out that the same number of minarets had been built for the Blue Mosque, out of *adab* for *Masjid-ul-Haraam*, he sent his architect to Makkah Mukarramah to construct a seventh minaret for the Mosque there.

The Difference between *Asl* (Real) and *Naql* (Fake)

Our stay at the Blue Mosque was brief. Hazrat performed *salah* there after which we left right away. On the way to the bus we passed by a performer dressed like a dervish with a giant *tasbeeh*, a comical turban and a big white beard, trying to attract the attention of tourists as they

passed by, some of whom would get their picture taken with him in exchange for a small price. As we made our way to our bus, this comical icon waived to us from afar. The difference between the fake and real *faqir* was drastic; the former was waiting for people to come to him, smiling and waving to get their attention, while the latter, our Hazrat, was swarmed by doting strangers wherever he went, and had to struggle to escape their attention.

After the Blue Mosque, we headed back to our hotel. Hazrat's flight was that same evening, so he was keen to get back to the hotel to prepare for the impending journey. To avoid last-minute anxiety, Hazrat always prefers to be packed well in advance, and at the airport ahead of time.

Bidding Farewell

We had all hoped against hope that by some twist of fate our time with Hazrat in Istanbul would be extended, but alas the time came to bid our beloved *Shaykh*, the light of our eyes, the undisputed king of our hearts, farewell. With heavy hearts we accompanied him to the airport, grateful at the opportunity of having spent so much quality time with him, wishing, as lovers do, for more and more, and yet more.

Having both witnessed and experienced, time and time again, the effect of Hazrat's *suhbah* (company) on the hearts of seekers, indeed of the mere *barakah* of his presence, we were certain that this trip would be a life-altering experience for us. And having seen the way the hearts of both Muslims and non-Muslims were attracted to his heart, a manifestation of the power of his *tawajjuh* and the irresistible magnetic pull of his *noor*, we knew that neither would the people blessed enough to behold his countenance in Turkey remain the same. Iqbal summed it up most eloquently when he said,

Day 5

کوئی اندازہ کر سکتا ہے اس کے زور بازو کا
نگاہ مرد مومن سے بدل جاتی ہیں تقدیریں

Can anyone gauge the extent of his power?
The mere glance of a true believer alters destinies.

The paper is finished, the pen is finished, and we are finished,
But, the fable of desire, is still not finished.

واخر دعوانا ان الحمد لله رب العالمين